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International student-athlete experiences at the NCAA Division I level

by

Eric R. Bentzinger

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Education (Educational Leadership)

Program of Study Committee:
Barbara L. Licklider, Major Professor
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Nancy J. Evans
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Iowa State University

Ames, Iowa

2016

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DEDICATION

To my ...

- Dad, Dana, who always told me never to quit something once you start and used sports as a vehicle to teach life lessons;
- Mom, Deb, who spent countless hours instilling in me the value of education and has regularly asked for updates on my dissertation research; and
- Wife, Kelsey, who supported me through the ups and downs of the dissertation research and writing process, and did not complain when I worked on it, even when there were more important tasks waiting to be completed.

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study focused on the experiences of seven non-native-English-speaking international student-athletes at an NCAA Division I, large, public, research institution. The experiences of the participants detailed their time prior to attending the institution, while enrolled, and plans after graduation. While previous literature on this topic existed, there was a paucity that positioned the international student-athletes, themselves, at the center of the research. Prior literature was largely quantitative. In an effort to avoid cross-institutional analysis and also due to accessibility of participants, all were selected from the same institution. The participants partook in a lengthy interview (at least one hour). The interview was transcribed and coded for themes before the participants reviewed the findings and added clarification. The coaches of four of the participants also took part to help triangulate findings. The data aligned with three central themes: (a) how they learned of the opportunity to participate in NCAA athletics; (b) their experiences at the institution; and (c) how post-graduation plans evolved once attending.

Unlike previous research on this topic, this study uncovered many specific challenges international student-athletes may face when attempting to attend an institution in the United States. This study also revealed specific information relating to how their coaches recruited them and how other athletics department personnel participated in the recruitment and eligibility process. Despite the often trying times and difficult adjustment periods, the participants indicated great appreciation for the opportunity they pursued. The participants indicated varying reasons for wanting to attend the institution, experiences at it, and post-graduation plans.

The findings of this study add to the literature on the topic of international student-athletes. The study may potentially impact a number of different constituencies, but it would have a logical line of interest to coaches, athletics department personnel, and potential international student-athletes. This study can also be utilized by anyone working at university because the influx of international student-athletes continues to persist and campus faculty and staff can help these individuals have a positive experience. Recommendations for future study include conducting a cross-institution analysis, investigating revenue-generating sports, or conducting a follow-up of individuals post-graduation.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

More than 20 million people watched their television screens as the head coach at State University made a “T” sign with his hands, the universal signal for a timeout in basketball. When CBS went to a commercial that was part of a billion dollar advertisement agreement, only the 70,000 fans attending the final of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Men’s Basketball Tournament in the football dome that was turned into a basketball arena could see the head coach drawing up the game’s final act. However, nearly everyone following the game knew the last shot would come from State University’s Mohammed Akeem, the star of the team. When play resumed, Akeem looked at the scoreboard and saw his team trailing by one point with a mere four seconds remaining. As he curled around his defender to receive the ball from his teammate, Akeem felt at ease.

Many of the millions of people following the game assumed by his physical appearance and name Akeem was likely not from The United States of America. Those who followed State University more closely knew Akeem was a senior from Egypt who initially had difficulty becoming eligible to play for his institution. Few knew the tribulations Akeem had in his childhood that made him a person who felt little pressure with a shot that could make State University millions of dollars. Few knew that Akeem had dealt with many acculturation issues when arriving on the State University campus four years prior. Few knew that Akeem cherished the opportunity he had to receive an education at State University so he could return to Egypt and help his native country.

As the ball left Akeem’s hand and arced toward the rim of the basketball hoop, media members covering the event salivated at the thought of writing a story about an international

student-athlete making the game-winning shot in one of the most lucrative games on the NCAA's annual calendar. The stories they would hurriedly craft before their 11:00 p.m. deadlines would likely focus on Akeem being from Egypt and be littered with statistics regarding the rarity of his feat. The stories would only graze the surface of his experiences, a story that could bring awareness and incredible new knowledge to the people who would learn about him throughout the night and the next day.

Akeem's story was not one that could be understood in a 10-minute post-game interview. His was a story that could not be covered in the 1,000-word limit afforded to the sports columnists covering the game. Akeem's entire experience could not be covered in the 30 seconds the news anchors were allowed on their television broadcasts. His story is not one that can be reconstructed or fully understood except by Akeem himself. The story shared similarities to those of other international student-athletes but was still completely different in many aspects. It is a story that was not fully made up of black-and-white facts like whether his last-second shot went in the basket. It was a story worth telling.

Background of the Study

During the past 20 years the number of international student-athletes on rosters of institutions under the governance of the National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA) has risen dramatically (Weston, 2006). In 1991, 8.5 percent of student-athletes at NCAA institutions were not from the United States. By 1996, the percentage had doubled to 17.1. From 2000-2009, the number of international student-athletes on NCAA Division I rosters increased more than 1,000 percent (Hosick, 2010).

The increase of international student-athletes joining NCAA athletics teams is closely related to coaches whose careers and livelihood have become increasingly reliant on winning and are looking for ways to fill their rosters with the most talented athletes possible. Weston (2006) stated, “The ever-increasing popularity of sports, along with the concomitant economic incentives have [*sic*] fueled a drive to identify and recruit talent across borders” (pp. 839-840). Baylor men’s basketball head coach, Scott Drew, said, “If you don’t recruit overseas, you are taking yourself out of a major market” (as cited by King, 2006).

A specific example of a team experiencing near-overnight success as a result of recruiting international student-athletes is the Baylor men’s tennis squad. The Bears had struggled to win against fellow Big 12 Conference schools for years before winning the 2004 NCAA championship and finishing second the following season with a team of nearly all international student-athletes (King, 2006). A major precept for recruiting international student-athletes to traditionally less-successful programs is they do not have the built-in perceptions of the institutions and athletics programs that exist with many domestic student-athletes. Baylor head men’s tennis coach Matt Knoll described his interest in recruiting international student-athletes:

We recruit the top American players, but when we started going head to head with Duke, Stanford, and UCLA... We can’t beat them for these kids. So do we let Duke beat our brains in because we’re taking third-tier Americans while they’re picking from the first tier? Or do we get first-tier (foreign) kids and try to beat them? What would you do? (as cited by King, 2006, n.p.)

Knoll’s comments align with a study done by Popp, Pierce and Hums (2011) about why international student-athletes ultimately decide on which school to attend. The trio of scholars wrote:

It appears domestic student-athletes, who are likely much more familiar with their college choices while still in high school, are more concerned with specific attributes of schools. International student-athletes, on the other hand, are likely not as familiar with the differences among U.S. colleges. Thus, international athletes seem more likely to base their decision on factors they are more familiar with, including cost of tuition and relationship with the coach. Knowing these key influencing factors can be quite valuable, particularly to coaches and recruiters employed at schools which [*sic*] may not possess the same overall reputation or academic prestige as their competitors. Coaches in athletic programs at such institutions may struggle to land blue-chip domestic recruits, but could have success attracting top foreign talent by simply utilizing an engaging personality and offering a full-ride scholarship to a university in the United States. (p. 184)

A second example of a team succeeding using primarily non-domestic student-athletes is the University of Texas at El Paso men's cross country team. In 2005, the team advanced to the NCAA Championship for the first time in 13 years and won three-straight league titles (Wilson, 2008). In 2008, the men's cross country team was made up of seven runners, all from Kenya (Wilson, 2008). The University of Texas at El Paso men's cross country coach Paul Ereng said, "The success and life of this team has come from international students" (Wilson, 2008, n.p.).

As a group, international student-athletes have unique aspects to their experiences in intercollegiate athletics. Adjusting to a new culture, language, education system, weather, and distance from their families are common to international student-athletes and are important to understand when looking at this group. In line with the multitude of aspects that make up the experiences of international student-athletes is that many policies exist from the NCAA as well as the United States government and their home governments. These policies can play a large role in the opportunity to attend an institution in the United States and the experiences of these individuals.

Statement of the Problem and Rationale for the Study

The number of international student-athletes on NCAA Division I rosters increased more than 1,000 percent from 2000-09 (Hosick, 2010). As a group, international student-athletes have been studied in a variety of fashions (Abbey-Pinegar, 2010; Bale, 1987, 1991; Guest, 2007; Jones, Koo, Kim, Andrew, & Hardin, 2009; Kaburakis, 2007; Ladd & Ruby, 1999; Popp, 2005; Popp, et al., 2009; Ridinger & Pastore, 2000a; Treasure, Carpenter, & Power, 2000; Weston, 2006). However, little research has been conducted looking at the group utilizing qualitative methods (Kontaxakis, 2011). Previous research has mostly relied on the use of surveys and statistical analysis. Because of the lack of qualitative data on a group that is expanding at a dramatic rate at Division I institutions, little information exists that positions the international student athletes' experiences at the center. As a result, studies on international student-athletes have not incorporated the first-hand knowledge that qualitative studies afford, and a tremendous resource opportunity has remained relatively untapped.

Purpose of the Study

This study was conducted to gain an increased understanding of the experiences of international student-athletes before, during, and after their time at Division I institutions. It was hypothesized that using a qualitative lens to explore their unique experiences may result in increased understandings that could be beneficial to people who interact or plan to interact with international student-athletes.

Research Question

The following research question guided this study: What are the experiences of non-native-English-speaking international student-athletes at a Division I institution? This question is important because the aspects of international student-athletes experiences that were explored are difficult to examine thoroughly in a quantitative study. As a result, the multifaceted aspects of international student-athletes' experiences has been a largely under-studied topic.

Answers to the following questions were sought to address the research question:

1. What are the reasons the participants wanted to attend their current institutions?
2. What are the different hurdles non-native-English-speaking international student-athletes have to clear in order to be able to attend their current institutions?
3. How were the participants recruited to their institutions?
4. When non-native-English-speaking international student-athletes arrived at their institutions, what were their experiences like as they adjusted to new environments and schools?
5. What factors have helped the participants to persist in their education in the United States?
6. What are the participants planning to do after they finish college in the United States?

Audience(s) for the Study

This study may impact numerous groups because it investigated the experiences of a large, diverse group (international student-athletes) and those who are a part of these individuals' time before, during, and after college. The audience of this study may also be of

interest and impact international student-athletes because the research is one of the first to investigate this group qualitatively. The coaches who are considering or already recruiting international student-athletes to compete on their collegiate athletics teams may also find the results of this study useful. Coaches could have numerous takeaways from this study that could impact their recruitment and retention of international student-athletes. Having a better understanding as to why international student-athletes are interested in attending institutions in the United States, the unique aspects of their time attending the institution, and their goals for post-graduation would be beneficial to coaches. A third audience for this study comprises administrators and support staff members in athletics departments who interact with international student-athletes throughout their college experiences. Because administrators and support staff make decisions that can impact the experiences of international student-athletes, having an increased understanding of their experiences is important. Finally, the findings could influence policy decision-makers who impact international student-athletes. One such entity is the NCAA. The more knowledge the NCAA and other decision makers have regarding the experiences of international student-athletes, the more likely they will produce sound policies related to international student-athletes.

Conceptual Framework

After completing initial research on this topic, I decided to utilize a conceptual framework to help organize the study instead of a theoretical framework. Miles and Huberman (1994) explained that a conceptual framework “explains, either graphically or in narrative form, the main things to be studied – the key factors, concepts, or variables – and

the presumed relationships among them” (p. 18). I employed a conceptual framework because I did not want to depend on an already-created model as there is a paucity of qualitative research based on the experiences of international student-athletes at institutions in the United States. As a result, I wanted my own understandings and research to help create a new conceptual framework. My thinking aligned with the development of conceptual framework as expressed by Maxwell (1996):

The most important thing to understand about your conceptual context is that it is a formulation of what you think is *going on* with the phenomena you are studying – a tentative *theory* of what is happening and why. The function of this theory is to inform the rest of your design – to help you assess your purposes, develop and select realistic and relevant research questions and methods, and identify potential validity threats to your conclusions. (p. 21)

Green (2005) noted that all sports organizations have three purposes: (a) recruitment, (b) retention, and (c) advancement of athletes. Green argued that this process works in a chronological fashion—athletes are first recruited by an organization, the organization then has the goal of retaining them, and lastly the athlete advances on to higher levels of the sport. The conceptual framework of this study builds on the work of Green. However, this study’s conceptual framework differs in that I believe all three facets Green described do not occur chronologically in the experiences of international student-athletes. Instead, recruitment, retention, and advancement are constantly impacting one another. After completing the initial research for this study, I realized that Green’s model clearly represented the areas I consistently found as being most salient with the experiences of international student-athletes.

Nevertheless, I did alter Green’s (2005) model to better fit my own thinking and understanding of the topic. Green’s initial model and my alteration may help others to

understand the study with greater ease in a systematic fashion. Figure 1 provides a visual depiction of the conceptual framework for this study through the use of a Venn diagram. The Venn diagram illustrates the constant interaction and non-chronological nature of college athletics, and how the three areas of a sports organization that Green (2005) provided impact the experiences of international student-athletes. Because these three areas are constantly interacting there is overlap between recruitment and advancement, advancement and retention, and recruitment and retention. Lastly, all three simultaneously interact at times as well. A more in-depth description of the conceptual framework is provided in Chapter 2.

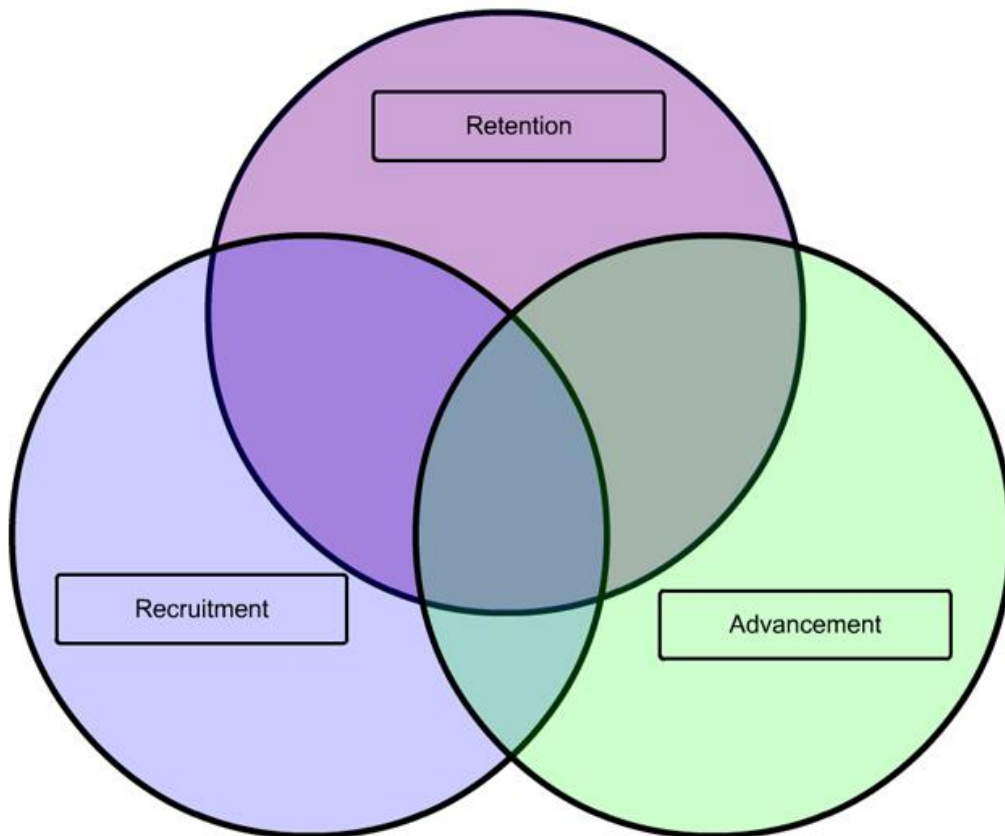


Figure 1. Conceptual framework utilized in the study

The findings for the study are expected to occur in all aspects illustrated in the Venn diagram. The study investigated how: (a) all three areas function independently; (b) two can impact each other; and (c) all three can simultaneously influence the experiences of international student-athletes.

Overview of Related Literature

Chapter 2 provides a more in-depth review of previously conducted relevant research to this study. The topic areas covered fall into one of three aforementioned categories that were originally positioned in Green's (2005) study: (a) recruitment, (b) retention, or (c) advancement of international student-athletes attending institutions in the United States.

Briefly, the literature review begins with a look at the recruitment of international student-athletes to institutions in the United States. Specifically, the issues that often occur with international student-athletes and the various causes for those issues are examined. Furthermore, the section on recruitment presents common reasons for recruiting international student-athletes and critics' viewpoints on the topic.

The second section of the literature review provides research on international student-athletes that is concerned with what impacts whether these individuals persist at their institutions. A main topic in this section is the adjustment international student-athletes experience and how it impacts their experiences in the United States. Information is also provided regarding the isolation that international student-athletes can often experience from the student body and why they experience it at much higher rates than domestic student-athletes and international students. A segment on retention also provides information on how team socialization and cross-cultural preparation can have a positive influence on

international student athletes' adaption to living in the United States. A section on retention concludes with studies on the different purposes for competing in athletics based on gender and the sport the individual plays.

The final section of the literature review addresses in detail the topic of advancement of international student-athletes as well as their post-graduate aspirations. The review of advancement-related literature begins with international student-athletes' viewpoints on the goal of playing professional sports and explores how this impacts their collegiate experiences. A second potential advancement opportunity is also examined for international student-athletes who are competing for their home countries in the Olympics. Next, the career aspirations of international student-athletes are covered and how their experience at an American institution impacts their future career goals. The section concludes with a discussion on different aspects of advancement for international student-athletes that deals with their personal growth.

Summary of Research Approach and Design

Because the purpose of this study was to allow the voices of international student-athletes to explain their experiences in the United States, this study incorporated qualitative research methods. According to Maxwell (1996), "The strengths of qualitative research derive primarily from its inductive approach, its focus on specific situations or people, and its emphasis on words rather than numbers" (p. 17). Maxwell's beliefs reinforce the need to perform a qualitative study for this topic.

Crotty (2008) outlined the four areas of an effective qualitative study: (a) epistemological foundation, (b) theoretical perspective, (c) methodology, and (d) methods for

data collection. This study utilized what Crotty defined as a constructivism epistemological foundation. Constructivism enables each individual to experience different phenomena and create his or her own meaning and knowledge (Crotty, 2008). The use of a constructivist lens was vital for this study because the purpose was to allow international student-athletes' voices to be at the center of the research by enabling the athletes to describe the different aspects of their experiences of attending college in the United States.

I used interpretivism as the theoretical perspective in this study. While I looked to position the experiences of the international student-athletes at the forefront of this study; as a researcher, I interpreted what was learned utilizing the conceptual framework. Merriam (2002) summarized the conduction of interpretive inquiry: "the researcher is interested in understanding how participants make meaning of a situation or phenomenon, this meaning is mediated through the researcher as an instrument, the strategy is inductive, and the outcome is descriptive" (p. 6). The use of interpretivism was clearly beneficial to me in accomplishing the purpose of this study.

I utilized a case study methodology with the same institution serving as the bounded system for the study. Creswell (2007) defined a case study as: "case study research involves the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system (i.e., a setting, a context)" (p. 73). Different institutions will cause different aspects of the experiences of international student-athletes to be more salient. The goal of this study was not to be generalizable to all international student-athletes. Instead, the purpose of this study was to provide in-depth knowledge about the experiences of the participants who attended the same institution. I did not wish to incorporate cross-institution analysis in this study because each university has its own unique characteristics that can impact the experiences of

an international student-athlete. For example, if I conducted a study with multiple institutions and one was located in a cold-weather state and another was located in a much warmer climate, there would be a greater likelihood for different results. I wanted as many constants in the study as possible. Creswell's writing echoed my belief that a case study is a beneficial methodology for this study. According to Creswell, "A case study is a good approach when the inquirer has clearly identifiable cases with boundaries and seeks to provide an in-depth understanding of the cases or a comparison of several cases" (p. 74). The institution that served as the bounded system for this case study is a large, public, research-based Midwest university that competes in Division I intercollegiate athletics under the NCAA's governance.

Semi-structured interviews and transcription were the primary method used for data collection for the study. Triangulation of information, and member checks were also utilized. The data collection methods (interviews and transcription) align with what Creswell (2007) described as important techniques to utilize in a case study methodology:

Case study research is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g. observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports) and reports a case description and case-based themes. (p. 73)

I conducted member checks by explaining to the participants the interpretations that were made from the semi-structured questions, and then checking if they accurately portrayed each individual's experience. Themes were derived from the transcription and coding process of the interviews. After transcribing the interviews, I used descriptive coding in the first-cycle coding process. According to Saldaña (2009), "Descriptive Coding

summarizes in a word or short phrase – most often as a noun – the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data” (p. 70). Saldaña also explained that descriptive coding helps to answer broadly “What is going on here?” and “What is this study about” (p. 70)?

The participants for this study were selected based on minimal requirements. Because I knew access to this group would be difficult, I looked for a combination of males and females who were: (a) non-native-English speakers, (b) not from the United States, (c) attending the institution that is serving as the case for the study, and (d) participating in a non-revenue sport (any sport other than football and men’s basketball). The reasons for making these decisions are detailed in more depth in Chapter 3. As previously stated, accessibility to this group was difficult. However, as an employee in college athletics for more than six years, I had gained trust with many gatekeepers who helped me gain access to participants for this study. Because I was not attempting to generalize to all international student-athletes and I had a low number of requirements for participants, I relied on the gatekeepers to assist in finding participants. As an additional measure to ensure goodness and trustworthiness for this study, I also planned to interview coaches of the participants in an effort to triangulate aspects of their experiences and to add breadth to the topic.

Researcher Positionality

As a researcher, understanding that I painted the reality of the group I studied (international student-athletes) based on my interpretations of the data collected was important to consider. “In qualitative research, the understanding of reality is really the researcher’s interpretation of the participants’ interpretations or understandings of the

phenomenon of interest” (Merriam, 2002, p. 25). As a result, sharing my prior experiences on the topic of international student-athletes is vital to the quality of the study.

I worked in collegiate athletics for more than six years. In my position, I interacted with a number of student-athletes from all over the United States and occasionally from other countries. Because of my interaction with international student-athletes, I gained an appreciation for the inherent differences they have from what many domestic student-athletes experience. Furthermore, the international student-athletes I interacted with had a different perspective than domestic student-athletes of being able to attend an institution in the United States and play competitive sports. I believe my increased appreciation for international student-athletes was an aspect of this research I needed to be honest about, and ensure it would not cloud my findings. I needed to be as honest and forthright as I could and not shy away from telling all angles of an individual’s story.

Another important aspect of my positionality as the researcher is the fact that I have experienced situations where I was a minority and experienced acculturation issues. I participated in a study abroad program in Europe as an undergraduate student and gained an understanding of what someone may endure who experiences acculturation and a feeling of isolation. Without mindful reflection, I could become engrossed in the acculturation and cultural differences international student-athletes experienced based on what I felt in the past.

Lastly, in my professional position in intercollegiate athletics, I often wrote feature stories about the more interesting aspects of a student-athlete’s career. I may define more interesting as the parts of their lives that I perceive others may find entertaining. Often, the areas that I focused on were not the most salient parts of the student-athlete’s life. Instead, I spotlighted what I believed would cause others to read the story and learn about the

individual. In this study, I needed to be cognizant of the importance of telling the whole story, not just the conceived interesting parts. The purpose of this study was not to magnify the more interesting aspects of the participants' life to get more people to read it. The purpose of this study was to provide as much knowledge to add to the literature on international student-athletes as possible. If I provided only interesting information, the study would be neither good nor trustworthy.

Definition of Terms

This section provides definitions for terms that are used throughout this study. The words are common in intercollegiate athletics, but may be viewed as jargon to individuals who are not knowledgeable on the topic.

Division I: Encompasses the more than 300 institutions that compete in this division of the NCAA. Division I is different from other divisions of the NCAA because schools in it are allowed to award financial assistance to student-athletes. The following statement from NCAA.org (2013) helps provide an understanding of the different divisions: “Competition is offered in Division I (the largest programs that provide the most athletically related financial aid for student-athletes), Division II (limited financial aid) and Division III (no athletically related financial aid).”

International student-athletes: Individuals who are not originally from the United States that are non-native English speakers who compete in Division I intercollegiate athletics.

NCAA [National Collegiate Athletic Association]: The governing body of 1,066 institutions' athletic endeavors (NCAA.org, 2013). The NCAA defines itself as:

The NCAA is made up of three membership classifications that are known as Divisions I, II and III. Each division creates its own rules governing personnel,

amateurism, recruiting, eligibility, benefits, financial aid, and playing and practice seasons – consistent with the overall governing principles of the Association. Every program must affiliate its core program with one of the three divisions. (NCAA.org)

Non-revenue sports: Refers to all Division I sports except for football and men's basketball; the only two sports that generate profit in college athletics.

Summary

In this study, my goal was to add to the knowledge of the experiences of non-native-English-speaking international student-athletes at NCAA Division I institutions in the United States through a case study methodology. This research is one of the initial qualitative studies conducted on this group (international student-athletes) and the first known case study. The study may provide new information that can be beneficial to international student-athletes, coaches, administrators, athletics department support staff members, decision-makers on policies that affect international student-athletes, and anyone who interacts with international student-athletes while at their institutions.

The second chapter provides a review of the relevant literature to this study and is organized according to the conceptual framework that guided this research. The main topics of Chapter 2 are: (a) recruitment, (b) retention, and (c) advancement of international student-athletes and how those three forces impact this group's experience while attending an institution in the United States. The third chapter is comprised of the outline used to conduct this study. The epistemology conceptual framework, methodology, and methods are presented in depth to provide a greater understanding of how this research study was conducted and the findings will be presented. Chapter 4 presents the results of the study based on the research questions. Finally, Chapter 5 provides a summary of the research findings, and offers suggestions for practice and future research.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

There has been a paucity of qualitative research conducted on the topic of international student-athlete experiences at the NCAA Division I level. The purpose of the literature review is to provide background information related to this study. The literature review also addresses previous studies that have focused on international student-athletes at American institutions.

The literature review section is divided into the three main themes that were outlined in the conceptual framework provided in Chapter 1: (a) recruitment, (b) retention, and (c) advancement relating to the experiences of international student-athletes in United States higher education. Each of the three segments contains subsections that elucidate aspects related to this study that have been investigated in previous research.

Recruitment

In line with what Green (2005) stated, recruitment is vital to any sports organization. Intercollegiate athletics teams are no different in the need to recruit student-athletes. International student-athletes are a group that has been targeted by coaches at an increasing rate. This section provides background information on the many areas that impact the recruitment of international student-athletes.

Factors emphasized

In a study conducted by Popp, Pierce, and Hums (2011) that looked at the reasons international student-athletes chose a particular school over other schools, the researchers found differences that exist between international student-athletes and domestic student-athletes that are important to this study. The scholars' study was based on a survey

administered to 969 international and domestic student-athletes at 15 NCAA Division I institutions. The findings revealed that international student-athletes choose their institutions for reoccurring reasons and the factors differ from those of domestic student-athletes. International student-athletes rated athletic scholarship value and the personality of their coaches as the most salient factors in determining a specific school to attend. Conversely, domestic student-athletes placed a greater emphasis on the degree they can attain and the academic reputation of the institution. These differences may seem surprising on the surface, but a greater understanding of the two groups makes it fairly predictable. The subsequent paragraphs provide a justification.

An important caveat to be mindful of regarding international student-athletes that will be discussed multiple times in this literature review is international student athletes do not grow up with the goal of competing for a school in the United States. They are often unaware of the option to study and compete in the United States until they are in high school. As a result, they do not have different built-in perceptions about schools in the United States, and this can have a large impact on where they ultimately decide to attend. Furthermore, international student-athletes are often dependent on the schools that are interested in them as possible choices. Instead of having a long list of schools they would like to attend, international student-athletes often have a small list of schools that are offering them scholarships from which to make a choice. Before international student-athletes are granted an international student work visa to study in the United States, they must show how they are going to financially cover the costs of receiving their education. As a result, an athletic scholarship can become extremely valuable to someone coming to study in the United States (Popp et al., 2011).

The second factor that comes into play with international student-athletes in deciding what college to attend—personality of the head coach—is also not surprising. As previously stated, international student-athletes are generally dependent on schools that are interested in them and offer them a scholarship. In most instances, the only representative from the institution that international student-athletes interact consistently with during the recruiting process is the head coach. As a result, the personality of the head coach can have a large impact on whether the international student-athlete ultimately decides to attend the institution (Popp et al., 2011).

Domestic student-athletes differ from international student-athletes in that they have the ability to go on campus visits often, or have an idea what school they would like attend. Because of increased accessibility to schools, institution factors are of much higher importance to domestic athletes than international student-athletes (Popp et al., 2011).

This section focused on the factors that contribute to how an international student-athlete chooses a school provides a specific example of how unique the experiences of international student-athletes can be. The next section focuses on specific issues that often arise during the recruitment of international student-athletes and how the problems can impact their experiences.

Eligibility concerns

For a variety of reasons, international student-athletes often have difficulty with initially being determined eligible by the NCAA. These eligibility issues often play a large role in the recruitment of international student-athletes because coaches invest resources (time and money) in the process. If an international student-athlete is unable to be deemed

eligible by the NCAA after coaches have invested a lot of time and money into his or her recruitment, the coaches become frustrated and often re-evaluate their philosophies in recruiting international student-athletes.

The NCAA guidelines mandate that to be eligible a student-athlete must be an amateur and at no time received “unnecessary compensation” for their sporting abilities.

Weston (2006) defined the amateurism rule as:

Student participation in intercollegiate athletics is an avocation, and student-athletes should be protected from exploitation by professionals and commercial enterprises...An individual who pursues sport as a vocation, even if the individual fails at that pursuit, shall not be permitted to compete in intercollegiate athletics. (p. 847)

Many Americans are aware of the NCAA’s amateurism rule and how violating it could potentially cost someone the ability to play intercollegiate athletics. Many domestic student-athletes first begin thinking of competing in intercollegiate athletics by playing for their schools prior to attending college in a scholastic sporting model (Rubingh & Broeke, 1998). Conversely, the idea of playing for the institution one attends is a foreign concept to many potential international student-athletes. According to Hosick (2010), “While domestic prospective student-athletes often prepare their whole lives – academically and athletically – for the chance to compete at an NCAA member institution, the same isn’t true for international prospective student-athletes” (p. 1).

Sporting models

Each country has its own unique sporting model that impacts its youth and their development. Regardless of what sporting model a country follows, the model has a large impact on its youth. The three main goals of youth sports participation, regardless of

sporting model, are: education, public health, and elite sport development (Siedentop, 1995). In addition to the aforementioned scholastic model utilized in the United States, this section outlines the club and government models. The differing sporting models presented are included to help build understanding as to why international student-athletes can experience difficulties maintaining their eligibility according to the NCAA amateurism rule.

Club. Many European cultures adhere to a club setup to create opportunities for young athletes. Athletes often sign with a club in their early teens as it provides the best resources available to develop. It is often likely that many young athletes have no desire to play intercollegiate athletics in the United States. If young athletes outside of the United States do have an interest in competing at an American institution, it is unlikely they are aware that by signing with a club they may lose their eligibility years later (Abbey-Pinegar, 2010). According to Hosick (2010), “From an early age, international prospective student-athletes who show an aptitude for sport are groomed to play that sport professionally” (p. 1).

“In other countries, it’s a non-scholastic model,” stated Geoff Silver, former director of amateurism certification for the NCAA. “What that typically means is that at all levels, from the most junior team to the most professional, there is some amount of stipend involved. They’re being paid something” (Hosick, 2010). This difference in philosophical understanding causes issues in international student-athletes being deemed eligible by the NCAA when they attempt to come to the United States.

Federal sporting. Another sporting model countries outside the United States often incorporate is one of heavy government involvement. Countries that utilize a heavy government involvement in their sporting philosophies generally fall into one of two

categories: (a) the sporting purpose of the country is to train gifted athletes to compete and win at international competitions, or (b) the goal is to help promote participation to help the overall health of the nation (Popp, 2005). A country's exercise policy is closely related to its world economic status. In economic powers like the United States and England, exercise is more privatized. In countries that struggle economically, access to sport and exercise is reliant on government action (Harvey, Beamish, & Defrance, 1993). Understanding what philosophy a country follows is important because it impacts how people access athletic opportunities, how resources are allocated, and how the citizens' health and national pride are affected (Chalip, Johnson, & Stachure, 1996).

Academic concerns

There are many academic hurdles students face in addition to the cultural differences between the United States and the countries in which international student-athletes reside. Universities often have difficulty determining academic preparedness for someone who graduated from high schools in different countries. The NCAA has minimum guidelines created for student-athletes, and it is difficult to translate these guidelines to international student-athletes (Weston, 2006). The next section provides a brief history of international student-athletes in the NCAA to help provide background on how policy has evolved to its present-day status.

History of the NCAA and international student-athletes. The first international student-athletes in the United States were comprised of a small number of Canadian track and field athletes in the early 1900s. A lot has changed on the topic since the arrival of these Canadian track and field student-athletes (Ridinger & Pastore, 2000a). The NCAA has made

great strides since it first discussed international student-athletes in 1913, when a committee was established “to study methods of athletic regulation and control in other countries” (Kaburakis, 2007, p. 109).

The next documented instance of the NCAA impacting international student-athletes was when it discontinued the Sanity Code in 1952. The Sanity Code was put in place as institutions began playing post-season football bowl games and intercollegiate athletics began to take the shape of a business. The purpose of the NCAA sanity code was fivefold: (a) declaring what designates an amateur, (b) the responsibilities of the institutions, (c) academic requirements, (d) financial aid policies, and (d) restrictions on recruitment (Brown, 1999). The recruitment restriction stated that institutions could not provide any financial aid at that time to student-athletes. Furthermore, a Constitutional Compliance Committee of three people was created that would enforce these new policies and punish schools that committed violations. The Sanity Code was eventually repealed for a variety of reasons, the majority based on punishment of schools in violation resulting in removal from the NCAA. According to Arthur J. Bergstrom, the athletics director at Bradley when the Sanity Code was created:

In fact, it got to the point where a great many schools, especially in the South and Southeast, said that if the code was adopted, they would withdraw their membership from the NCAA. Those schools at that time were some of the few granting aid to athletes. They felt the code placed quite a restriction on the amount of financial aid that could be granted. (as cited in Brown, 1999, n.p.)

Despite the repeal of this code, its incorporation of restrictions on recruitment of student-athletes began what would eventually create increased influences on recruiting international student-athletes. According to Brown (1999):

But the seed of the enforcement program Bergstrom would eventually administer had been planted in the Sanity Code. Though the code itself was defeated, the Association knew that it had to develop an enforcement program rooted in the integrity that the code professed. (n.p.)

The legislation that was created that impacted international student-athletes did not stop with the Sanity Code. During the 1970s, a series of court cases were filed against many of the NCAA's unjust rules related to "foreign athletes" (Kaburakis, 2007). At one time the NCAA had a "flat-age" rule regarding international student-athletes that stated international student-athletes would lose one year of eligibility for each year after their 19th birthdays. The NCAA did not have a similar rule for domestic student-athletes, so the rule was eventually repealed (Kaburakis, 2007).

By the mid-1980s, the NCAA had created the International Student Records Committee that developed a set of academic standards from over 180 countries. These standards were used to determine the eligibility of prospective student-athletes (Hosick, 2010). The creation of the standards was designed to help the committee look at the academic background of international student-athletes to see if they were ready for the academic rigors of the American institution they were attempting to attend. The committee has continually updated its eligibility standards.

Before 2007, the NCAA charged each institution with the responsibility of investigating the eligibility of its international student-athletes, usually through the athletics department's compliance office. Each international student-athlete was required to complete an NCAA-created questionnaire about his or her athletic and academic history. The institutions' compliance offices investigated any vague aspects of the questionnaire. The process was difficult because it relied on the international student-athletes to provide all the

needed information for a process that often confused them, and it also exhausted the time and resources of institutions' compliance departments (Abbey-Pinegar, 2010). Former NCAA men's basketball coach, Bob Knight, criticized the setup: “ (four) interns (may) have to sit and study some country they have no idea where the hell it is to begin with ... and then determine that this kid is or is not pro” (as cited in Miller, n.d.).

Today, the process to determine the eligibility of international student-athletes is centralized in the NCAA Eligibility Center. The purpose of the NCAA Eligibility Center is to have a more consistent and objective viewpoint on eligibility issues (Hosick, 2010). Many issues still exist within the NCAA Eligibility Center regarding international athletes. The center looks at two primary areas: (a) whether the international student-athlete has the required academic background to be eligible, and (b) if the individual is considered an amateur athlete. The center has to depend on self-reported documentation it receives from the student-athlete.

Many cases of fraud and dishonesty have occurred (Hosick, 2010). The NCAA Eligibility Center has had instances wherein the club team of the international student-athlete does not want to lose its athlete. As a result, the club provides invalid documentation (Hosick, 2010). “[The international student-athletes] all of a sudden have to navigate our structure, a structure that was designed primarily with domestic prospective student-athletes in mind,” according to Scott Johnson, associate director of academic certification at the NCAA Eligibility Center (as cited in Hosick, 2010, para. 6).

The NCAA Eligibility Center has to continually research the structure of the international student-athletes' educational systems and relate them to the American elementary/middle/high-school setup and investigate what to do if an individual has lived in

multiple countries (Hosick, 2010). Another aspect the eligibility center has to research is that many international student-athletes have managers while they are part of a club system. The NCAA Eligibility Center has to investigate whether the managers could be considered agents (Hosick, 2010). The aforementioned decisions are why 90 percent of amateurism violations found by the NCAA Eligibility Center are from international student-athletes, when they only make up five percent of those who apply for eligibility (Hosick, 2010).

The next three sections discuss three issues colleges in the United States must often consider when determining whether they want to recruit international student-athletes.

Nationalism

An issue discussed in previous research is that international student-athletes take potential scholarship opportunities away from Americans (Ridinger & Pastore, 2000b). Some Americans are upset that tax money being used for athletics scholarships at public institutions is not being awarded to American citizens (Weston, 2006). According to the head men's tennis coach at Midwestern State University:

Parents are pissed and our American youngsters are getting screwed. Big time. Why does college tennis have to be a world class sport? If they want to have one foreign player on a squad, fine, I'm all for it for international good will, but [five] or [six] on most teams in this country? What the hell are we doing? (as cited in Weston, 2006, note 10)

Another argument against the recruitment of international student-athletes is that colleges in the United States are training individuals that can defeat American athletes in future international competitions (Ridinger & Pastore, 2001). Other detractors claim international student-athletes create cultural discomfort, and they are only going to United States institutions for athletic reasons (Ridinger & Pastore, 2001).

In response to individuals who do not like international student-athletes being more prevalent, University of Texas El-Paso (UTEP) athletic director, Bob Stull, was quoted as saying he did not think it mattered (Wilson, 2008). Other employees from UTEP stressed that when the international student-athletes or any student-athlete put on the school's uniform, "We are all from UTEP" (Wilson, 2008).

Personally, I believe an institution needs to understand its purpose and mission when gauging its interest in recruiting international student-athletes. If the institution's mission is to provide opportunity to those in its community and it uses athletics as a vehicle to achieve that mission, the recruitment of international student-athletes may not be in its best interests. Conversely, if an institution desires to make a larger impact in a multitude of areas and views athletics as a way to attract attention, interest, and diverse groups of students, the recruitment of international student-athletes would be advisable.

Creating opportunities

Providing access for international student-athletes helps create opportunities to receive an education in the United States to individuals when it likely would not otherwise exist. In many of the countries that international student-athletes call home, they do not have access to higher education at the same level as found in the United States (Bale, 1991). As discussed previously, the premise of melding academics and athletics together is not experienced in other countries and draws international student-athletes to institutions in the United States (Berry, 1999).

Furthermore, in the ever-evolving globalized society, international student-athletes can help with, “Fostering international relationships, exchange, and understanding” (Weston, 2006, pp. 831-832). Hosick (2010) echoed this sentiment:

The influx of different cultures into American colleges and universities has brought about benefits for domestic student-athletes who are exposed to a different world view, and for their international counterparts who often have unique opportunities through the American system that binds sport and education. (p. 1)

In the instance of the Kenyan cross-country members at the University of Texas El-Paso, Wilson (2008) discussed how all of these runners wanted an American education and knew that the only way they could afford it was to participate in athletics. “I wanted to do something unique, something the others didn’t do,” said Japeth K. Ng’Ojoy, a member of the University of Texas El-Paso cross country team. “We need a lot of doctors” (in Kenya) (as cited in Wilson, 2008, para 16).

Jones, Koo, Kim, Andrew, and Hardin (2009) studied the reasons international student-athletes decide to come to the United States to receive an education by using a Likert scale survey. Their findings revealed four primary reasons: (a) athletic attractiveness, (b) institution attractiveness, (c) desire for independence, and (d) environmental attractiveness. The four reasons international student-athletes decide to come to the United States are important to consider to better understand this topic. It is important to note the fact that athletics and what the international student-athletes can achieve plays a major role in their decision-making processes. The research has indicated that without athletics or access to athletics international student-athletes would not be attending a particular institution.

The findings of Jones et al. (2009) echo what other scholars have also revealed in similar studies. Bale (1987) found that international student-athletes rarely have access to the

sports facilities in their native countries that they would have if they attend an institution in the United States. Along with the lack of access to sports facilities in their home countries that attracts international student-athletes to the United States, they rarely have the ability to receive sports-specific medical treatment that is available to them as a collegiate student-athlete (Bale, 1991). The understanding is that medical facilities are not just limited to hospitals and doctors. Student-athletes at institutions in the United States often have access to daily care by athletic trainers. Athletic trainers provide immediate care, injury prevention, rehabilitation, and access to medical equipment that many international student-athletes would not receive in their home countries. International student-athletes also have similar interests in attending an institution in the United States for the opportunity to receive better coaching than what they could have access to in their home countries (Bale, 1991).

Fan benefits

Lastly, an increase of international student-athletes benefits the fans who follow each specific sport as well as those who are fans of a team that has international student-athletes. With an increase in talent and skill sets at the collegiate level, fans can benefit greatly from being able to watch international student-athletes whom they would not have been exposed to otherwise (Weston, 2006). According to Hosick (2010), “Bringing in international prospective student-athletes can sometimes raise the level of play, create better competition and level the playing field” (p. 1).

Retention

Retention focuses on the factors that impact whether a student-athlete continues at his or her institution. This section addresses the many components of the experiences

international student-athletes have once they are attending an institution in the United States, specifically those that pertain to whether these individuals persist. According to Green (2005), in order for an athlete to continue, he or she must find value in participation in sports. Value generally comes from making connections, such as exhilaration, social interaction, skill development, team affiliation, and fitness (Cox, 2002). As stated in the methods section, although this study does not align directly with Green's model of sport organizations, there are many similarities. Fitness was not directly addressed in previous studies on international student-athletes, but an argument can be made that it impacts exhilaration because fit athletes are more likely to succeed in competitions.

Popp (2005) described the importance of retaining international student-athletes:

Keeping international student-athlete retention rates high are [*sic*] a concern for coaches and administrators for several reasons. High retention can help lead to a better academic progress rate (APR) score and can assist in developing international recruiting pipelines. Many NCAA Division I schools cannot compete in recruiting battles for elite domestic talent, but those schools can use international connections and recruitment to help level the competitive playing field. (p. 203)

The components Popp (2005) addressed in the importance of retention are commonly discussed in studies on intercollegiate athletics and international student-athletes. The following sections provide information on the factors that can impact whether international student-athletes persist.

Adjustment

When they first enter college, international student-athletes experience many of the same areas of adjustment as domestic students. The added aspect of competing athletically for their institutions brings unique challenges that impact international student-athletes'

transition to college life. One difference between international student-athletes' adjustment and that of domestic student-athletes, is navigating new cultural and language barriers (Popp, 2005).

Ridinger and Pastore (2000a, b) conducted a quantitative study that investigated how four different groups of students adjusted to college: international student-athletes, international students who did not participate in athletics, domestic student-athletes, and domestic students who did not compete in athletics. Ridinger and Pastore administered a 67-item Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire, and received 443 total usable responses from the groups previously identified. The purpose of their study was to investigate what, if any, differences existed in college adjustment between the groups. All the surveys were administered to individuals at a large, Midwestern university. Ridinger and Pastore had 16 usable responses from international student-athletes.

After running three ANOVA tests on their data, Ridinger and Pastore's (2000a) data indicated international student-athletes had the best overall adjustment to college among the four groups studied. Although their findings indicated that international student-athletes do not have difficulty adjusting to college, the authors conceded they had a very small ($n=16$) sample size of international student-athletes in their study.

After completing the aforementioned study, Ridinger and Pastore (2000b) developed a model for understanding international student-athlete adjustment based on the Baker and Siryk (1989) Student Adaption to College Questionnaire that they felt was the preeminent quantitative model to analyze student adjustment to college. Baker and Siryk's Student Adaption to College Questionnaire was comprised of 52 items that were based on the four areas they believed most impacted college adjustment: (a) academic adjustment, (b) social

adjustment, (c) personal-emotional adjustment, and (d) institutional adjustment. However, Ridinger and Pastore (2000b) argued the Student Adaption to College Questionnaire did not account for athletes. As a result, they constructed their own framework consisting of the five adjustments for international student-athletes: (a) academic adjustment, (b) social adjustment, (c) athletic adjustment, (d) personal-emotional adjustment, and (e) institutional adjustment. Ridinger and Pastore believed athletic performance, academic performance, and overall satisfaction with their institutions were the three most salient categories for international student-athletes.

A pertinent component of many international student-athletes' adjustment to attending an institution in the United States is the cultural differences they encounter. When someone enters a new culture, he or she encounters three dimensions of shock: (a) culture shock, (b) language shock, and (c) shock of self-discovery (Wilcox, 1994). A brief overview of each type of shock identified by Wilcox is provided in the next subsections.

Culture shock

Studies on new cultural experiences have determined culture shock is one of the initial experiences of someone who enters a new country (Befus, 1988, Kontaxakis, 2011; Wilcox, 1994). Befus (1988) defined culture shock as “the period of transition and adjustment during which a person who has relocated experiences some degree of anxiety, confusion, and disruption related to living in a new culture” (p. 381). It is important to understand culture shock because it occurs after a “honeymoon” stage when someone enters a new country. The honeymoon stage occurs for a time period of roughly two months after which someone has arrived at a new country, when he or she is excited to be in a new place

and this excitement helps the student to look past the differences they experience from their homes (Black & Gregersen, 1991). The impact of culture shock is something that can severely tarnish someone's experience in a new country if it is not understood and addressed.

Language shock

Similar to culture shock, language shock has been identified by Wilcox (1994) as when someone first deals with realizing he or she cannot communicate with the dominant culture through language. Craven (1994) added that language shock also includes understanding different colloquialisms, dialects, idioms, and other unique aspects of a specific language. When first confronted with language shock, people feel stressed because they perceive that their intelligence is underappreciated. In addition to culture shock, language shock is a facet of the experience non-English-speaking international student-athletes may face that has an immense impact on their abilities to adjust to their new surroundings and persist at their institutions (Church, 1982; Hishida, 1985).

Shock of self-discovery

For individuals who experience culture and/or language shock, it is a time of self-discovery regarding what they value and coming to terms with their new environments (Wilcox, 1994). As a result, someone may realize he or she is not as open-minded as they may have presumed and they carry their own biases because their own values and norms are challenged. If individuals were to surround themselves with like-minded individuals, they would not be aware of their own values because they would not have been challenged.

Isolation

At many large institutions, student-athletes are often separated from the dominant student body in a variety of fashions. Adler and Adler (1985) provided numerous examples of aspects of student-athletes' experiences that isolates them from the rest of the student body. Student-athletes often have special tutors and access to educational facilities that traditional students do not. They also travel on many weekends and practice in the mornings and evenings, which makes socializing with non-student-athletes difficult. Living with other student-athletes is commonplace in college athletics because of the familiarity with one another as well as having similar schedules. Eating meals with other athletes is also a regular occurrence with student-athletes. Because student-athletes often get to choose classes before other students, picking classes with other student-athletes is common.

Student-athletes often socialize with one another when they are not practicing or competing because of the vast array of shared experiences and interests. Adler and Adler described how the isolation student-athletes had from other students caused their norms to be determined by others involved in athletics. When regarding international student-athletes, they face the same isolation from campus as domestic student-athletes. Ladd and Ruby (1999) described how international student-athletes do not become involved with campus activities because what is offered frequently does not have a global scope or fit their interests. Nevertheless, because of cultural and language differences with domestic student-athletes, international student-athletes can often feel isolated from their own teammates. Because of the increased isolation, international student-athletes may feel drawn regularly to one another, especially to those from similar cultures.

Team socialization

While international student-athletes are often isolated from the rest of the student body and can be alienated from their domestic teammates, being a member of a team does provide an immediate opportunity to socialize with a group (Popp, 2005). The immediate built-in social network a team can provide international student-athletes is a reason international student athletes have higher graduation rates than international students (NCAA, 2006). In addition to having teammates to interact with, international student-athletes receive financial assistance with scholarships. Because they do not have the financial concerns that many international students face, international student-athletes have one important stressor eliminated from their college experiences that could otherwise cause them to leave their schools (Popp, 2005).

Cultural preparation

Multiple studies have illustrated that individuals who participate in cross-cultural preparation before entering a new country have better experiences in their new environments than those who do not (Befus, 1988; Craven, 1994; Wilcox, 1994). Craven (1994) noted four characteristics of an individual that can travel to a new culture successfully: (a) respect of host nationals, (b) non-judgmental perspective, (c) flexibility, and (d) people orientation. Understanding these important components before traveling to a new country, as well as culture shock, language shock, and shock of self-discovery are vital to ensuring a successful transition. Craven also outlined the importance of continuing cultural understanding once the individual arrives in the country to minimize the negative emotions that can persist.

A factor that can have positive influence on the adjustment of an international student-athlete is communication preparation before traveling to the new country (Wilcox, 1994). The significance of understanding how, when, and what to say cannot be overstated. Wilcox believed the individual should prepare for cross-cultural interactions/adjustment and culture shock, interpersonal skills, professional and communication competencies, and problematic areas and barriers. Participating in cultural preparation through communication is a key component for international student-athletes and to this study because language shock has been shown to be a likely cause of difficulty in adjusting. In this study, communication adjustment and how it impacts the experiences of international student-athletes is analyzed.

Befus (1998) studied a group of 64 international students who traveled from North America to Costa Rica to study Spanish. The study provided treatment to alleviate potential emotional psychological stress through psychotherapeutic training before arriving in Costa Rica. The students who participated in the cross-cultural preparation had fewer issues with their adjustments than the control group, which was comprised of individuals who did not have cultural preparation. Befus's study provided an example of how cultural preparation can positively impact the experiences of sojourners. Befus's research is included in this literature review because the current study analyzed if the international student-athlete participated in any cultural preparation and how it impacted his or her experiences. If the participant did not partake in cultural preparation, Befus's study illustrated how a student's beliefs may have helped and provided recommendations for effective cultural preparation.

This section on cross-cultural preparation is important to the current study because it provides possible ways coaches and administrators can help alleviate some of the negative

aspects of acculturation that many international student-athletes experience when arriving in the United States. By having international student-athletes partake in cross-cultural preparation before arriving in the United States, some acculturation issues may be minimized.

Similar to cultural differences, the varying viewpoints on the purpose of playing intercollegiate athletics is important to this study because addressing these issues can have a large impact on the experiences of international student-athletes. The next two sections discuss studies related to differences athletes experience based on the sport they compete in as well as their genders. These two topics are included in the discussion on retention because having an understanding of the reasons student-athletes compete and attend school are important for the coaches and administrators who can have an impact on each student athlete's experience.

Differences based on sport

Riemer, Beal, and Schroeder (2000) conducted a qualitative study to determine whether different academic adjustment levels exist between females who played tennis and basketball. The researchers studied female athletes at two different NCAA Division I schools. One of the institutions was a large, public school in the Midwest whereas the other college was a small, private institution located on the West coast. After completing interviews regarding (a) demographics, (b) athletics, (c) academics, and (d) social experiences with the female student-athletes from both schools, the researchers identified their own themes. After common themes from each researcher were found, they both reanalyzed the transcripts and agreed on three common themes: (a) view of career

termination for tennis players, (b) professionalization of college athletics for the basketball players, and (c) all female athletes felt social isolation.

The female tennis players indicated they had previously believed they would be professional athletes. However, some of the participants said that, prior to starting college athletics, they realized they would not be able to play professionally. As a result, they were using college tennis as a way to continue to compete in the sport they love, with the understanding that their academic advancement would be more important for them professionally (Riemer et al., 2000). Conversely, the basketball players believed they had a duty to compete and train at a high level to earn their scholarship money. The basketball players had a greater ambition to play professionally or continue in the sport in some capacity (e.g., coaching) after they exhausted their eligibility (Riemer et al., 2000). The differences in the experiences of the student-athletes in the study were not intended to be generalized to all female student-athletes in all sports. However, the authors' analysis does provide a strong example of how individuals who play different sports can have vastly different viewpoints about their experiences.

Studies conducted by Astin (1993), Pascarella, Edison, Nora, Hagedorn, and Terenzini (1996), and Pascarella, Truckenmiller, Nora, Terenzini, Edison, and Hagedorn (1999) have illustrated that playing in revenue-generating sports (football and men's basketball) can have negative impacts on cognitive development of participants. However, the same relationship did not exist for men and women who competed in non-revenue sports.

A study conducted by Adler and Adler (1985) helped shed light on the negative academic development in men's basketball. Findings of the authors' ethnographic study on a men's basketball program at the NCAA Division I level revealed that the men's basketball

players had little decision-making regarding their academics, believed their athletic accomplishments outweighed anything they did academically, and intentionally enrolled in less rigorous classes and majors. As a result, the men's basketball players grew disconnected with their academic requirements and perceived that, if they simply continued to stay in school, they would eventually get their degrees (Adler & Adler, 1985). Similar to the varying differences in viewpoints on the purpose of playing collegiate athletics on a sport-by-sport basis are the diverse viewpoints on the purpose of competition based on gender.

Differences based on gender

Findings of a qualitative study conducted by Duda (1989) determined when individuals compete athletically they are looking to achieve one of two goals: (a) task-orientation; or (b) ego-orientation. Task-orientation is when someone looks to master a particular skill and/or improvement. Ego-orientation is based on the notion that someone bases his or her success on the results of the competition and their own personal achievements. Individuals who view athletics through ego-orientation use sports as a vehicle to enhance social status as well. Duda's study revealed that female athletes fall under the task-orientation category more often than males. Conversely, male athletes view sport achievement through an ego-orientation lens. Duda's study provided a specific example that individuals need to account for to understand potential differences between the experiences of male student-athletes and female student-athletes.

White (1995) examined the differences between male and female athletes who played sports for recreation and male and female athletes who competed at the intercollegiate level. White's findings echoed Duda's (1985) study in that women more often viewed sports as a

way to build skills and foster relationships, whereas men viewed sports as a way to enhance themselves socially and even compete professionally.

In a groundbreaking study at the time, Bale (1987) applied quantitative analysis to investigate the experiences of international student-athletes. Bale sent questionnaires to international athletes who competed for institutions in the United States and received 93 usable responses. The results indicated that 60 percent of the respondents had or planned to graduate from the American institution they attended. The majority of the international student-athletes identified that their overall experiences were satisfactory. However, they cited discrimination, homesickness, loneliness, finances, issues with coaches, depression, cultural adjustment, the college's administration, and loss of motivation as adjustment issues they had to address. Bale's study is important to take into account when analyzing the experiences of international student-athletes because it revealed that, even though an international student-athlete may graduate, the individual may have faced a unique set of circumstances that can have a negative impact on his or her time in intercollegiate athletics.

Male and female student-athletes choose the school they attend for differing reasons, and their determining factors can be attributed to their genders. In a study conducted by Popp, Pierce, and Hums (2011) on the reasons international student-athletes choose a particular school, the results indicated differences between male and female student-athletes, regardless of the individual being domestic or international. The findings revealed that male student-athletes place a greater emphasis on athletic factors the school provides, including facilities, level of competition, chance for conference title, tradition, value of athletic scholarship, and playing time amongst a bevy of others. Conversely, females placed a higher emphasis on academic factors such as: degree leading to a good job, school reputation,

academic programs offered, and attractiveness of campus among others. This study espoused another example of the differences between male and female international student-athletes and their reasons for competing in intercollegiate athletics.

Bale's (1987) study, as well as all the previous sections on retention, is important to this study for several reasons. Having coaches and administrators who are aware of the unique issues international student-athletes have to overcome to be successful is the main purpose for including this section. Furthermore, if coaches and administrators want their international student-athletes to persist, understanding each sojourner's experience is paramount to ensure they have an enjoyable experience and they are accomplishing what they aspired to when deciding to attend the institution.

Win at all costs

Popp, Hums, and Greenwell (2009) conducted a study that analyzed the different purposes of sport between international student-athletes and domestic student-athletes. Findings of the study revealed that international student-athletes do not put as much emphasis on winning as their domestic counterparts. International student-athletes are often more concerned with skill development and the larger picture of what it means to receive an education while competing versus winning.

Guest (2007) researched the different perspectives of competition between soccer players at United States colleges and soccer players from Malawi. The findings revealed that the American soccer players viewed winning as a paramount indicator of success as athletes. Conversely, the soccer players from Malawi did not mention winning. The Malawi players

focused on team building and the ability to express themselves through sport as their reasons for participating.

A variety of opinions exist to explain the different perspectives between domestic student-athletes and international student-athletes on the importance of winning. Popp et al. (2009) believed the differences may arise from the fact that domestic student-athletes are brought up in a culture that highly emphasizes collegiate athletics. For many domestic student-athletes, college sports are seen as the peak of their careers. As a result, domestic student-athletes highly emphasize winning. Additionally, domestic student-athletes are often coached at a young age to win at all costs and that losing is a form of failure. On the other hand, many international cultures value improvement, skill mastery, and utilizing sports as a way to promote a healthy lifestyle. The values of international student-athletes are vastly different from what is often emphasized in the United States's sporting culture.

The importance of understanding the myriad of aspects regarding the prior experiences of international student-athletes is vital for coaches and administrators in their efforts to retain these individuals. For example, if a coach is constantly pushing an international student-athlete to win at all costs, it may cause the sojourner to feel uncomfortable and he or she may not compete at his or her highest ability level. As a result, the international student-athlete may not enjoy his or her experience and leave the school.

Advancement

In the model Green (2005) developed about sports organizations, advancement “prescribes that the athlete should move to more advanced levels of training and competition. This typically requires that the athlete move to more advanced teams or squads within the

same club, or that the athlete move to another club altogether” (p. 244). For the purpose of this study, advancement considered the importance of international student-athletes’ desire to meet their prescribed goals for attending an institution and how those goals may change during their time in the United States. International student-athletes decide to attend institutions in the United States for varying reasons. However, for an athletics team at a university to continue to succeed in recruiting and retaining international student-athletes, the importance of the sojourners meeting their goals in regard to advancement is paramount. For many student-athletes at institutions in the United States, playing professionally after their college careers are complete is a form of advancement. However, previous studies have shown international student-athletes do not often have the goal of playing professionally after college graduation.

Playing professionally

Previous research has indicated international student-athletes at institutions in the United States did not decide to attend these schools with hopes of playing professional sports in mind (Duda, 1989; Kontaxakis, 2011; Popp, 2005; White, 1995). However, research that points to the contrary does exist (Popp, et al., 2011). Duda’s (1989) research outlined the differences between individuals who compete in sports for ego orientation purposes and those who play for skill mastery. White’s (1995) study echoed the findings of Duda. Ego orientation is described as individuals who value their successes in athletics based on how they do in competition and play sports to enhance their social statuses. Athletes who fall in the ego orientation category are more likely to view sports as something they want to continue playing professionally. A study conducted by Treasure, Carpenter, and Power

(2000) analyzed the different viewpoints between professional and amateur rugby players. Treasure et al. analyzed survey results from 79 professional rugby players and 106 amateur rugby players, and revealed that professional rugby players fall into the ego orientation mold at a much higher rate than the amateur players. The study did not intend to generalize differences between all professional and amateur athletes; nevertheless, it does provide a specific example of differences in the viewpoints that professional and amateur athletes have regarding sports.

The second category athletes fall into is how they conceptualize goals is skill mastery (Duda, 1989). Individuals who play sports for skill mastery participate to improve, build cohesion with teammates, and value sportsmanship. Popp (2005) conducted a study on international student-athletes wherein participants conceptualized goals in the skill mastery category more so than ego orientation. The work of Popp, Duda, and White (1995), and Treasure, Carpenter, and Power (2000) provided quantitative examples of how international student-athletes are more often concerned with skill mastery and, therefore, are not as likely to have the goal of playing professionally. The current study echoes many of the previous research conducted on the goal of playing professionally, but it differs in that it is a qualitative study.

Kontaxakis (2011) conducted a qualitative study to uncover the experiences of six non-native-English-speaking international student-athletes at NCAA Division I institutions in the United States. A major theme that emerged in Kontaxakis's study was that the participants did not attend their institutions in the United States with the goal of playing professional sports. A participant who was identified with the pseudonym "Georgia" said, "playing basketball professionally makes you feel confident but if something happened such

as a(n) injury you can be in trouble. Education is a better way to achieve things in life” (p. 97). A second participant in the study who was identified as “Jennifer” said the following in regard to wanting to play professional tennis:

I think everybody tries to go professional, but by the age of probably 15, you can already say if you will go professional or not. A lot of kids at the age of 12 give up school. Instead of going to school they practice for seven hours a day. I wanted to go professional, but I didn’t want to give up education, so I, I just didn’t really like, I wanted to, but I decided that I would rather make sure I have an education and have a degree, then I’ll go professional and then one day, I don’t know, break my ankle and that’s it. That time my goal was to receive an education and to play sport and just, you know, just find out what I want to do, go to a university or something else. (p. 80)

The study completed by Kontaxakis (2011) provided qualitative examples that international student-athletes do not necessarily attend institutions in the United States with the hope of advancing to play professionally. This research was included in this literature review because understanding what the goals of international student-athletes are following graduation is a necessary factor to consider when conducting research on international student athletes’ college experiences. These studies indicated that international student-athletes participate in intercollegiate athletics in the United States with little interest in competing professionally in the future. While studies have indicated international student-athletes have little interest in competing professionally after graduation, representing their home nations in international competitions is something they may look to achieve. The next section provides information on how international student-athletes may desire to compete in the Olympics for their home countries.

Olympic aspirations

The sports international student-athletes compete in are well-represented in both the summer and winter Olympic Games. Previous research has indicated many sporting systems international student-athletes are raised within are created to help train potential athletes to win at the international level (Brown, 2004; Popp, 2005). Furthermore, critics of international student-athletes competing for institutions in the United States have stated they believe colleges are training future competition of American Olympians in their own backyards (Ridinger & Pastore, 2001). Empirical data does exist to support the claim of training Olympic competition for the United States, as 40 percent of swimmers who medaled at the 2004 Olympic Games were trained at American institutions (Brown, 2004). In addition, numerous National Basketball Association (NBA), National Hockey League (NHL), Professional Golfers Association (PGA), Major League Soccer (MLS), and Women's Professional Golfers Association (WPGA) players are international athletes that play or played for institutions in the United States. Despite the prevalence of international student-athletes competing for their home countries internationally, no previous studies were found to determine whether this is an aspiration of international student-athletes during their collegiate careers.

Future jobs

A recurring theme regarding international student-athletes' advancement that was not found in Green's (2005) model is their desires to compete in an effort to gain an advantage in future job searches. Despite Green's failure to address this aspect, prior research has indicated that international student-athletes considered having an advantage over non-athletes

when looking for future jobs. I believe this component of their experiences is related to advancement because it pertains to what the individual plans to do after completion of competition. A participant in Kontaxakis's (2011) study, who was referred to as Bolt, said:

Back (in Greece) was like, it was messed up. The system doesn't work properly, so it holds you back a little bit. It makes it like foggy, you don't know where you're gonna, when you're gonna finish school. So I came here just to know that in four years I'm going to have a good degree and I can find a better job. (p. 71)

Andrea echoed the statement made by Bolt in the Kontaxakis (2011) study: "I heard that employers see as an advantage if you were a leader of the team because it means that you are organized, you know how to work with people, lead the group, have the ability to communicate" (p. 108).

Another form of future jobs is when international student-athletes want to gain experience in a profession in order to return to their homes to help their native countries. "I wanted to do something unique, something the others didn't do," said Japeth K. Ng'Ojoy, a member of the University of Texas El Paso's cross country team. "We need a lot of doctors" [in Kenya] (Wilson, 2008, para 6).

The studies conducted by Popp (2005), Kontaxakis (2011), and Popp, Pierce, and Hums (2011) revealed similar results regarding the importance of athletics as a vehicle to improving future career opportunities for international student-athletes. Findings of a study by Popp and Popp, Hums, and Greenwell (2009) revealed that international student-athletes rated the importance of enhancing their future career statuses as an important reason for playing sports at an institution in the United States. The aforementioned studies also revealed that the country of origin does not impact the importance international student-

athletes placed on future career opportunities as a reason of participating in intercollegiate athletics in the United States.

The idea that employers value the skills individuals learn while playing intercollegiate sports is often cited as a motivation for participating, but little evidence exists to support that claim (Argent & Robinson, 2005). The understanding that international student-athletes come to American institutions in an effort to improve their future career opportunities is important to this study and is addressed in latter sections. Before moving the discussion away from advancement, the next section highlights several forms of advancement that are categorized under personal growth in the current study.

Personal growth

In addition to playing professionally, Olympic aspirations, and career opportunities, international student-athletes come to the United States with hopes of advancement in ways that do not fall under the previous categories. For the purpose of the current study, these forms of advancement are referred to as personal growth. Specific sections were not developed because little research has been conducted on the following related topics.

Kontaxakis (2011) found having a degree from a school in the United States is important to international student-athletes and will be beneficial for them after they are done competing. Whether a degree from the United States is viewed more favorably than a degree in an international student-athlete's home country was not discussed. Another important form of advancement to international student-athletes is learning to speak English at a high level. In Kontaxakis's study, a participant, Andrea, said, "Either in the U.S. or in my country learning English as a second language will be good for my future." Kontaxakis also stressed

international student-athletes believe that living independently in a new culture will prove vital after they are finished competing. Lastly, the development of life-long skills and understandings from living in a new culture is important to international student-athletes and something they believe will aid them for the rest of their lives (Kontaxakis, 2011).

Summary

This chapter provided a review of literature relevant to this study. The chapter was divided into three main sections: recruitment, retention, and advancement of international student-athletes. The sections were based on the work of Green (2005) pertaining to the three purposes of sports organizations. However, for purposes of this study, the model was augmented to indicate that the three purposes of a sports organization are non-linear and constantly interacting. The augmentation of Green's model can be found in Figure 1.

Recruitment pertained to the reasons coaches pursued international student-athletes to be members of their teams at NCAA Division I institutions. Many reasons exist but, generally speaking, recruiting international student-athletes expands the pool of potential student-athletes and enables coaches to enhance their rosters. Recruitment was also concerned with reasons international student-athletes were interested in coming to the United States. The section on recruitment outlined how coaches pursue international student-athletes and some of the hurdles they faced regarding athletic and academic eligibility.

The second section of the literature provided background on retention. This section pertained to approaches coaches and other individuals at a university could take to ensure the international student-athletes did not leave the institution. The section on the retention

provided information on some of the challenges international student-athletes faced when arriving on campus and what could be done to help prepare them.

The final section of the literature review discussed advancement. This section provided insight related to what international student-athletes were often looking to accomplish after they graduated or left the institution. Common areas of interest included: competing professionally, participating in the Olympics, or pursuing a career outside of athletic competition.

This study provides new knowledge on the topic, specifically by direct statements made by international student-athletes, themselves. As the literature review indicated, little information existed on this topic by other qualitative research methodology.

The next chapter provides the methodology for this study. Additionally, Chapter 3 presents the rationale for the decisions regarding the methodology and details relating to how the study was conducted.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

The experiences of non-native-English-speaking international student-athletes at an NCAA Division I institution were sought and analyzed in this study. This study was conducted to enhance the literature on this topic by utilizing qualitative research methods. Previous research on international student-athletes existed but little was conducted with qualitative research methods. Thus, this study looked to position of the international student-athletes, themselves, as the primary data source to discuss their experiences and enhance to knowledge on this topic.

Qualitative Paradigm

Qualitative research affords the researcher the opportunity to not only admit that there are multiple answers but also to actively seek out the multiple realities of a phenomena. According to Creswell (2007), “When studying individuals, qualitative researchers conduct a study with the intent of reporting these multiple realities” (p. 18). In addition to embracing the multiple realities of a phenomenon, qualitative research provides the researcher the platform to let individuals share their experiences in a variety of forms. Maxwell (1996) discussed this advantage of qualitative research: “The strengths of qualitative research derive primarily from its inductive approach, its focus on specific situations or people, and its emphasis on words rather than numbers” (p. 17). Crotty’s description of when to use qualitative research aligns with its use in the current study: “We conduct qualitative research when we want to empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the power relationships that often exist between a researcher and the participants in a study” (p. 40). I have included a definition of qualitative research that is based on Crotty’s belief

that it [qualitative research] encompasses an up-to-date description. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) defined qualitative research as:

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (p. 3)

Qualitative research is comprised of four elements that help guide the study: (a) epistemology, (b) theoretical perspective, (c) methodology, and (d) methods. Epistemology embraces “how the researcher knows what she or he knows” (Crotty, 2007, p. 16). The theoretical perspective provides the lens the researcher uses to make meaning of the phenomenon being studied. The methodology describes the qualitative approach that will be utilized to frame and shape the study. Lastly, the methods are “the techniques or procedures used to gather data” (Crotty, 1998, p. 3). The following sections provide a detailed description of how each component is related to the four elements that were used to shape this study.

Epistemology: Constructivism

This study utilized Crotty’s (1998) definition of constructivism. Constructivism asserts that each individual experiences different phenomena and creates his or her own meaning and knowledge. Constructivism is appropriate because the purpose of this study was to portray the experiences of international student-athletes as they lived them, and to ascertain how they made meaning in their own minds of what occurred. The use of

constructivism allows the participants' voices to be heard and for the researcher to illustrate aspects of the topic that other forms of research would either limit or exclude completely. Furthermore, because little research on this topic exists that has employed this research methodology, the study will add to the existing literature on the experiences of non-native-English-speaking international student-athletes.

Theoretical perspective: Interpretivism

The theoretical perspective I used in this study is interpretivism. Through interpretivism, I employed a case study methodology to create meaning based on interactions with participants throughout the research process. In other words, interpretivism allowed me to make interpretations based on the interactions I had with my participants to generate knowledge on the experiences of international student-athletes. Merriam (2002) described the interpretivist approach as: "the researcher is interested in understanding how participants make meaning of a situation or phenomenon, this meaning is mediated through the researcher as instrument, the strategy is inductive, and the outcome is descriptive" (p. 6). The interpretivist approach was effective in this study because this perspective enhanced the purpose of the study to understand the meanings international student-athletes made of their experiences at an institution in the United States.

Methodology: Case study

Previous studies have revealed that the institution attended can have an impact on why international student-athletes decide to enroll, and the institution also affects athletes' experiences (Bale, 1987; Popp, et al., 2011; Riemer, et al., 2000). Since the institution attended can play a role in the experiences of international student-athletes and their

decision-making processes, I decided to remove the possibility that international student-athletes would come from different universities in this study. Because the purpose of this study was to provide information on what the participants' experienced and would not be generalizable to all international student-athletes, all participants were from the same institution. Therefore, case study methodology was deemed most appropriate for my research. Crotty (2007) defined case study methodology as:

Case study research involves the study of an issue explored through one or more cases with a bounded system (i.e., a setting, a context)...Case study research is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audio visual, and documents and reports), and reports a case description and cased-based themes. (p. 73)

Thus, Crotty's definition was utilized in this study. Because the case is so important in this form of research, a detailed description of it is provided in the next section.

Case description

The institution that was selected for this study served as the case—or bounded system (Crotty, 2007). The institution in the study is a large, public, research-based university located in the Midwest. This institution participates in NCAA Division I intercollegiate athletics. The institution was selected because it participates in NCAA Division I athletics; therefore, student-athletes are able to receive financial aid (often full tuition and board) to attend the institution. The institution used in this case study was also selected because of its accessibility to international student-athletes. As a researcher, I was cognizant of the potential difficulty of accessing participants for this study, and I had built contacts with gatekeepers to this group at the institution for this study. Creswell (2007) noted that gaining

access to participants is one of the biggest hurdles to overcome in case study research, so this was an issue I did not take lightly. If the goal of this study was to provide information that can be generalizable to all international student-athletes, it would have been unethical to consider an institution for a case study with one of the reasons being accessibility.

However, since generalizability was not the purpose of this study, the rationale behind selecting this institution met the goals of the study. According to Creswell (2007), the premise of doing generalizable case study research is: “What motivates the researcher to consider a large number of cases is the idea of “generalizability,” a term that holds little meaning for most qualitative researchers” (p. 76).

Data Sources

The primary source of data was the interviews with the international student-athletes who participated in the study. The international student-athletes who were selected met the following criteria: (a) non-native-English speakers, (b) not from the United States, (c) attending the institution that is serving as the case for the study, and (d) participating in a non-revenue sport (any sport other than football and men’s basketball). A brief description of the rationale for each of these decisions is included as follows.

The reason for selecting participants who were non-native-English speakers was based on the findings of Wilcox (1994) relating to language shock (see Chapter 2). Because of the existence of language shock, international student-athletes whose primary language is English would have had a different experience than those who were non-native English speakers. As a result, this study investigated only international student-athletes who were non-native English speakers.

The difference between domestic student-athletes and international student-athletes is the latter group is not originally from the United States. This study only focused on student-athletes whose home country was not the United States.

For the reasons described in the methodology section of this chapter, all the participants attended the institution that was selected as the case because differing institutions can have unique aspects that impact an international student-athlete's experience.

Individuals who participate in revenue-generating college athletics sports (football and men's basketball) have been revealed to have different experiences than those who compete in other sports (Adler & Adler, 1985; Astin, 1993; Pascarella et al., 1996, 1999). Because of the differences between non-revenue and revenue-generating sports, this study only focused on international student-athletes who did not compete in either football or men's basketball.

In addition to the four requirements of participants listed previously, I sought to have a combination of female and male participants as well as individuals from multiple sports. Previous research has revealed that men and women experience sports in different ways (Duda, 1989; Popp, et al., 2011; White, 1995); therefore, it was important to include both male and female participants. Studies have also been conducted that provide information to support that individuals who play different sports have different experiences (Astin, 1993; Pascarella et al., 1996, 1999; Riemer, et al., 2000). As a result, having multiple sports represented in this study also helped provide insight into the experiences of international student-athletes. This study included five female and two male participants. The respondents participated in five different sports, and they represented seven different countries on five separate continents.

Recruitment of participants

It should be noted that, as the researcher, I completed human subjects training and received Institutional Research Board (IRB) approval prior to conducting the study (see Appendix A). The use of gatekeepers to gain access to participants who met the requirements for this study was the initial step in the research process. After gaining access to individuals, I contacted them or had the gatekeeper contact them. Then I discussed the purpose of the study in greater depth with each participant prior to confirming whether they were interested in participating. After confirming their interests in participating and ensuring they fully understood their roles in the study, the participants were asked to each sign an informed consent document containing information about the study and a guarantee that their identities and any potential identifying characteristics would not be released. After each individual signed the agreement form, he or she was able to begin to participate in the study.

Data Collection

Creswell (2007) noted that all qualitative data collection essentially falls into one of four categories: (a) observations, (b) interviews, (c) documents, and (d) audiovisual materials. Interviews and transcriptions were the primary form of data collection utilized in my study.

Interviews

Because the purpose of this study, and all qualitative studies, was to provide a platform for the voices of the participants, the use of interviews in this study was paramount (Creswell, 2007). Interviews afford the researcher the opportunity to gain an in-depth understanding of their experiences. The interviews for this study were semi-structured and

focused on the reasons each participant decided to come to this institution in the United States, experiences during his or her time at the institution, and his or her goals after graduation.

The goal of the interview was to discuss the topics covered in the interview guide (see Appendix B). However, the interview guide was simply a starting point for the interviews, as numerous follow-up questions were asked based on what the participant shared. In addition to the initial interview with the participant, a follow-up interview was conducted to confirm how I understood what was discussed during the original interview. The follow-up interview is discussed in greater detail in the ethical considerations sections of this chapter.

After interviewing each participant, I looked to interview other individuals who played a large role in that participant's experience at the institution through snowball sampling. Based on my initial interview with the participant, I sought out those who have played an important role in the participant's experience at the institution. The secondary interviews are discussed in further detail in the ethical considerations sections of this chapter.

Data Analysis

Crotty (2007) stressed the importance of descriptive analysis in case study research. Crotty also explained that the goal in case study research is to uncover themes from the data. In order to identify themes and accomplish Crotty's goal, I utilized descriptive coding in the first-cycle coding process. Saldaña (2009) explained, "Descriptive Coding summarizes in a word or short phrase – most often as a noun – the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data" (p. 70). Descriptive coding helps to answer broadly "What is going on here?" and "What is this study about" (p. 70)? Descriptive coding was an advantageous method to utilize in this

study because it aligned with the research design and purpose of this study. I wanted to have aspects of the experiences of international student-athletes vividly described in a manner that has not been previously researched. Descriptive coding helped me uncover the key components of what the participants described about their experiences.

During the first-cycle coding process and throughout the research process, I employed analytic memos. Saldaña (2009) described analytic memos as: “somewhat comparable to researcher journal entries or blogs – a place to ‘dump your brain’ about the participants, phenomenon, or process under investigation” (p. 32). Analytic memos were helpful to me in reflexively organizing my thinking, especially in transitioning to the second-cycle coding process.

Following the first-coding cycle, I used pattern coding during the second-coding cycle. My goal was to help synthesize the multitude of codes I created during the first-cycle coding process. I believe many of the different descriptions I used in the first-cycle coding process could fall under broader categories or themes. Saldaña (2009) described how pattern coding helps to group information into larger themes, so I utilized it during the second-coding cycle to organize the first-cycle codes into broader categories. Pattern coding aligns with what I wanted to accomplish. I then color coded the transcripts to find what themes were relevant in the text.

The coding process allowed me to streamline many aspects of the interviews and organize meaningful quotes. I wanted my thoughts organized before doing member checks (an explanation of member checks is included in the Trustworthiness Criteria section) because it was unreasonable to ask my participants to re-read all the text from the transcriptions. Instead, I discussed with my participants the themes that emerged from the

coding process and the supporting data to ensure that everything aligned with their interpretations of their experiences.

Trustworthiness Criteria

Throughout the entire process of a qualitative study, conducting highly ethical and trustworthy research is of great importance (Merriam, 1998, 2002). As the researcher, I was in a position of power to determine the themes, and aspects of my interviews and observations I would display. Merriam (2002) discussed the position of power a researcher has: “In qualitative research, the understanding of reality is really the researcher’s interpretation of participants’ interpretations or understandings of the phenomenon of interest” (p. 25). Because I was aware of the power that I possessed and since the overall purpose of this research study was to allow the voice and stories of an international student-athlete to be at the forefront, much of the findings section presents quotes from my participants. Furthermore, this study also utilized member checks and triangulation, two methods often used in qualitative research to insure goodness and trustworthiness (Merriam, 2002). The following two sections discuss my use of triangulation and member checks in this study.

Triangulation of data

Triangulation is a tactic researchers can use to strengthen internal validity. Merriam (2002) noted that internal validity is analyzing: “How congruent are one’s findings with reality” (p. 25). Merriam contended triangulation (when the researcher uses multiple forms of data and data collection) is the most well-known method for enhancing the internal validity of a study. For example, interviewing multiple individuals about the experiences in

the same bounded system will help strengthen internal validity. In this study, I interviewed multiple individuals with varying backgrounds and interests at the institution at which the study was conducted, and conducted interviews with other figures with knowledge of the participants' experience in order to triangulate the data from each participant about his or her experience.

Member checks

A second tactic used to strengthen internal validity in qualitative research is the use of member checks (Merriam, 2002). Merriam defined member checks as:

Here, you ask the participants to comment on your interpretation of the data. That is, you take your tentative findings back to some of the participants (from whom you derived the raw data through interviews or observations) and ask whether your interpretation 'rings true.' (p. 26)

As stated previously (in the Interviews section), I conducted member checks after coding the transcripts of interviews with the participants. During member checks, I reconvened with the participants, shared with them the interpretations I had made, and made sure my understandings aligned with their perceptions.

Delimitations

This study examined the experiences of non-native English-speaking international student-athletes at a Division I institution in the United States. I interviewed individuals to whom I could gain access through gatekeepers at the institution that met the criteria outlined in the methods section. Because I utilized gatekeepers to help locate the student-athletes who attended the institution, the participant pool was limited to the individuals who were accessible. I was aware that the experiences of the population I examined can vary

dramatically by individual, gender, native country, and/or sport played. As a result, there are certainly experiences that other non-native English speaking international student-athletes have knowledge on that the individuals I interviewed did not discuss. Furthermore, individuals from other institutions will likely have had different experiences that are specific to their institutions that could not be displayed in this study. International student-athletes in different regions of the United States will likely have different experiences than those that participated in this study.

A second delimitation is I did not utilize observations as a data collection method. In many qualitative research studies, observation is an important data collection tool. I chose to not conduct observations. I did not find a suitable form of observation that would be beneficial to this study that also met the requirements of human research policies at the institution I attended. My original plan was to conduct observations in the homes of the participants to gain a better understanding of their daily lives. However, participating in observations in private realms of a participant's life is not allowed by the human research governing body at my institution. After my initial interviews, I did not perceive that observations were necessary or beneficial to this study.

The results of this study should not be extended to other competition levels in collegiate athletics. The importance of athletics scholarships to international student-athletes at Division I institutions cannot be overstated. An international student-athlete who does not have a scholarship and attends a Division II or III institution will likely have a dramatically different background, experience, and goals for post-graduation than the population studied. As a result, this study was delimited to only those who had received a scholarship and attended a large, public institution that competes in Division I athletics.

Limitations

The access to participants from varying backgrounds, sports, and genders proved to be the most trying component of this study. The rules of the NCAA (specifically Title 9) have a trickle-down effect that make non-native English speaking male international student-athletes from a variety of sports difficult to access. Men have the same opportunities as women in NCAA athletics, but with football utilizing a bulk of the resources, there are fewer men's sports offered at many institutions. The population studied for this research does not participate in football, so the lack of student-athletes on a campus for this study who are men resulted in there being fewer men studied than I planned.

A second component that could have limited this study is the participants being concerned about their coaches or administrators learning of them complaining or potentially unearthing an NCAA violation. The participants for this study tended to hold a great deal of loyalty to their coaches and institution; therefore, I occasionally sensed a feeling they wanted to focus on "the good parts" of their experience and remain vague about the specifics of being recruited. I do not believe any of the participants intentionally withheld information from me; nevertheless, I perceived they preferred to expand on the positive components of their experiences.

Ethical Considerations

Protection of the participants' identity was crucial to this study, and many efforts were made to best accomplish this goal. Each participant was able to choose the name they would be referred to in this study. Furthermore, many efforts were made to keep the specific sport they competed in as well as their country of origin unknown to the reader.

Nevertheless, when it was important to have a broad understanding of the participants' sport

or country of origin, limited information was provided. The participants did not take on any risk of health during this study. The participants could also choose to not answer any questions that made them feel uncomfortable.

As previously stated, as the researcher, I had previous experiences and biases for which I made every effort to not allow to become a part of this study. Another area of consideration regarding ethics is the role of being an insider versus an outsider at an institution in a case study. An insider may have built in perceptions or previous experiences that could play a role in how participants were selected, questions asked, and the data presented. An outsider may have different perceptions that could be factual or not that may also play a role in a similar study. Many efforts were made to not allow my role as either an insider or an outsider to have an effect on this study or how the data were presented.

Summary

This chapter justified the methods and methodology that were used in this study. These methods enabled me to meet the purpose of this research and do it in a trustworthy and ethical fashion. The results of my data analysis are provided in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4. RESULTS

The results of this study are disclosed in this chapter. To better help the reader follow the experiences of the seven participants, the results are presented in a narrative format with a section on each participant. The participants' experiences are displayed similar to that of a story written in chronological order. Each section begins with background information on the participant before describing how he or she first learned of the opportunity to pursue an education in the United States. The section concludes with a summary of the participant's experience and the individual's plans after graduation that he or she described during this study.

In each section, the participant is positioned as the primary source of data; thus, his or her quotations are included. Some participants' coaches participated in this study; therefore, his or her quotations are presented when necessary to provide more depth to the section.

Participants

Coco

Coco is from a North American country and English is not her primary language. The sport Coco participates in is generally considered to have numerous expenses associated with its training and competing. Prior to college, Coco's family would have paid for her to participate in a club and Coco could only practice the sport in the closely supervised club setting. Coco's sport differs from one like soccer where an athlete can play pickup games or practice on his or her own. All of Coco's training had to be supervised and paid for by her family. Furthermore, her family would have been responsible for paying for her to travel to competitions and injury rehabilitation (which is common in her sport). Because of the high

cost of participating in Coco's sport, one can make a safe assumption Coco was raised in, at the least, a middle-class socioeconomic background. It is important to consider Coco's socioeconomic background when learning about her experiences as an international student-athlete and her personal reflection.

This section provides Coco's story, and begins with how she first learned of the opportunity to attend an institution in the United States. Coco's story is presented in a chronological manner and concludes with her plans after graduation from the institution in this study.

Coco's interest in attending an institution in the United States was initiated through athletics. Based on information from her interview, it seemed without competing in athletics Coco would not have thought of attending an institution in the United States. Coco explained how she first learned of attending an institution in the United States:

It was my friend from my club. She was like, "Hey, I know someone that did it." ...also, there was one girl who helped us...She went to (an institution in the United States) and was talking to me about it.

After learning about the existence of the opportunity in the United States, Coco continued to gather information from the arena she had great comfort in – her club. She talked to her coaches to learn more about the opportunity and what could be done:

My senior year of high school we had a talk with our coaches. Basically, I was going to be done with (her sport) and that is not what I wanted. Because, as a senior, if you are not going to (the international level), you are basically done...I asked if there were any other options. Then I heard about this program in the United States, and I thought that sounded fun, that sounds like something really interesting and I wanted to keep going (in her sport) because I felt like I wasn't done.

Coco referenced other reasons for having an interest in attending an institution in the United States but clearly athletic competition was the primary factor:

I wanted to have another perspective. I wanted to travel. I thought learning English would be perfect... it was for the experience...we have nothing like that. We don't have frats, we don't have sororities. I am not in one but I feel like the whole experience of college in America is basically what you see on TV. I thought it was like a dream. It sounded really cool.

Once Coco determined she wanted to attend an institution in the United States so she could continue to compete in her sport, the process began in earnest. Coco had no understanding of how colleges in the United States operated or the existence of the NCAA. Coco believed that if she received a scholarship (despite not fully understanding what a scholarship was) she would attend that institution and worry about academics later:

I had no idea how college works and stuff...It was just basically who is going to offer me a scholarship and then whatever I wanted to do as a major. I didn't even know at that point what I wanted to do. Well, I basically knew I wanted to be a vet. Knowing whether they had the program or not, it didn't really matter.

Next, Coco had to market herself to coaches from the United States, many of whom had never heard of her. This became a daunting task due to her and her club coaches' unfamiliarity with the United States' system. Regardless, Coco entrusted her club coaches with trying to help her receive a scholarship. Coco described the role her club coaches played in marketing her:

(Her club coaches) didn't know how that worked, so they knew (another coach), and he did it. I don't know what school he was at when he was here in the States and then he moved (to Coco's home country). So, he basically helped me with the videos and he contacted schools. He helped coaches come to (her home country). We would do all those recruiting practices with them. Yeah, it was something different because I was not talking English at all. I couldn't speak, so I was a little overwhelmed at that point.

Coco's coach at the institution in this study (Kevin) provided his viewpoint on how he first heard of Coco and began the recruitment process. Kevin first learned of Coco through word of mouth; a coach telling him to consider offering her a scholarship:

We heard through a liaison in (Coco's home city) that he had contact with four or five kids that were interested. So, he sent some videos to us and that got our attention for all of those kids because he spoke (Coco's native language)...we saw video on these kids and (Coco) was one of them. We were interested and from there it was contact this guy and ask, "What do we do from here?" He said, "I will get you in contact with the families and then we can do that from there." So, he made it available to us that the families would e-mail us and then we could start a dialogue that way.

Coco described how difficult the communication during the recruiting process was for her family because of the language barrier:

My parents would talk to (the coaches) in the beginning because they obviously were better than I was...(Her dad) listens to TV shows in English and stuff like that...When they would call, I would be really nervous because all I could say was yes, no, yeah, ok...I didn't really like it.

After starting communication with Coco, seeing video footage, and watching her practice at her club, Kevin offered her a scholarship. Receiving the scholarship offer is what triggered Coco's interest in attending the institution in this study. Without the scholarship offer, Coco would have had little (if any) interest in attending the institution. Coco was the only participant who was able to come on a recruiting visit, and seeing other athletics teams play for the institution made an impact on her decision:

Well, my recruiting trip, I came and it was for a football game. I was like, "Oh my god." It was crazy. You see those things in TV shows or in movies. I never thought that was something that was happening in real life. I was like, "Is this what you do every day?" I was like, "OK, yeah, I want to be a part of this."

Coco said she had a scholarship offer from another institution but after her recruiting trip to the institution in this study, she accepted Kevin's scholarship offer without visiting the other school. Coco mentioned how she gravitated to the institution's athletics website during her recruitment process and spent considerably less time on the academic pages:

I went on the website...(for athletics) and the school. It was very confusing for the school...I didn't know how it worked. It was all in English and I was like, "Oh my god." But, for the athletics, I was like, "Oh, it sounds fun."

After accepting the scholarship offer from the institution in this study, Coco needed to complete paperwork to be able to leave her country, be deemed eligible by the NCAA, and receive admission to the university. Coco relied heavily on Kevin and his coaching staff to guide her through the paperwork process. A factor to consider is how important the relationship is with the coaches during the initial process. The coach evaluates talent, begins and builds a relationship, extends a scholarship, sets up a visit and then, ultimately, becomes a personal advisor to make sure the international student-athlete is eligible. Coco shared a story that nearly prevented her from gaining access to the United States, which she said was the result of relying too heavily on the coaching staff for directions:

I didn't know the paperwork and we got to the border and the guy was like, "Where is your this form?" It was the I-20 actually...I didn't have it...He was like, "Well you are going to have to go home and get it." I didn't even know what it is. We thought (a coach) gave me all the stuff I would need and that was missing. Then the guy was really nice and spent over two hours there because he said he would print it for us...I had no clue what I needed to come here, but I knew I was coming.

Despite knowing she was coming and being accepted to the institution, Coco did have second-thoughts two months prior to attending:

Two months before I came (to her current institution), I told my mom..."Mom, what if I don't like it? This is so different. I am going to be a (long distance) away from you guys."...it was not knowing how easy it would have been for the transition, how hard it was going to be for English...how hard it was going to be in (the sport she competes in), how I was going to get used to this. It was all of that.

As previously mentioned in this section, Coco had access to the institution prior to attending because it was within driving distance. Coco's location enabled her to participate

in a recruiting visit and take part in a summer course prior to her freshman year. Coco believed the summer course was beneficial for her in her initial adjustment on campus. Coco described the summer course which was her first experience as a student at the institution:

Well, I did the (summer course) program during the summer and that was really helpful. It helped knowing what I was getting myself into, just getting my feet wet a little bit...I did one class and it went super well...I think I got an A minus, but I was not talking. I was reading and that was when I saw that I could do it.

Despite the summer class and accessibility to the institution, Coco's limited English-speaking skills impacted her as a freshman. Coco's lack of English proficiency affected her socially, academically, and athletically during her freshman year at the institution in this study. Before illustrating how her English skills impacted her adjustment to the institution, background information regarding Coco's exposure to English prior to coming to the United States is beneficial. Coco described her English-speaking background:

It started in middle school that we start learning English...Basic words, nothing very serious...We can do conversations but it is like, "Hi, how are you" and very basic. Then, you go through high school. I never really applied myself because I didn't think I would really need it. All my plans were to go schools in (her native language)...So, I could have a normal conversation. I was pretty good at hearing or reading, so that helped me in my first year to get grades with school.

Like all incoming international student-athletes whose native language is not English, Coco passed The Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL). However, her English-speaking skills were far from perfect. Coco said her lack of English proficiency impacted her with her teammates and in the classroom:

(At practice), it was kind of hard feeling always part of the team, especially preseason. I just felt, like a little bit on my own. I didn't really want to talk too much because I was afraid of my English. The girls were really nice, like I still felt in the team, but I just felt really different...Of course, in the classroom, that was hard. I think I had English or something like that. I had

to drop it because I couldn't do it...It was very fast paced and I wasn't used to it. I couldn't even listen. So, like, that was the hardest part I think. My academic advisor (name removed), she really made sure I had classes I could pass. She put me in chemistry or math, things that are with numbers or not too much like the language.

In addition to just her lack of proficiency in English, Coco discussed how different accents also made her less confident about her speaking skills. Coco's accent resulted in her being shy and not having an interest in being socially active during her freshman year. Coco explained how her accent impacted her:

I didn't know how much people like accents here. I would have, maybe, involved myself a little bit more. Because my first semester, I kept to myself. I didn't want to talk to anyone. It was like don't approach me, I don't want to talk.

Kevin, Coco's coach, echoed much of what she described in how her English proficiency created some difficulty during her freshman year:

She appeared very, very shy. I think a lot of that was because she was embarrassed about her English. As soon as her proficiency was better I saw her open up a lot more...She's a very outgoing kid. So, just being able to converse freely in the language that everyone else is speaking has really opened her up.

As a result of experiencing discomfort because of her lack of English-speaking skills, Coco gravitated to other international student-athletes. Coco described the relationship she formed with another international-student athlete whose first language was not English and how that helped:

There was a girl on the tennis team, she's from (the same country as Coco) and people on the team told me about her. So, I talked to her and she like told me how it was for her. It was basically what I went through. I mean she was very helpful. Just to feel like somebody that I did, did the same thing. She was in tennis but it is the same. You are a part of a team, a student-athlete.

In addition to seeking comfort from an international student-athlete on a different team at the institution in this study, Coco explained how her own team was important to her.

The built-in network of a team was supportive for Coco and provided a great benefit:

If I was not on a team, I think it would have been really hard...I felt like so much support from them...if I had any questions, if I had trouble in classes, they would help me...They would correct my English. (A teammate) spell checked all my papers and stuff...The support from everyone was really helpful.

Coco referenced the institution's office to aid international students and her academic advisor as important components to her initially becoming comfortable in her new setting. A background note is student-athletes at the institution in this study are assigned an advisor who works in the athletics department. The athletics academic advisor assists the student-athlete with initial class scheduling, choosing a major, participating in required study hours, and monitoring academic progress (such as grades, class schedules, and degree completion). Non-student-athletes do not have access to someone in a similar role. Coco described the role the office to aid international students and her athletics academic advisor played in her experience:

The people at the (office to aid international students) were very helpful if I had problems...I just didn't feel judged when I was going there, speaking bad English. I feel like they've seen it and it was normal...They have friendly reminders and if I need anything, I can just e-mail this lady, she will be like, "Oh, just come in, I'll sign it for you." Or, my parents need a paper saying I am student (at her current institution) so I can still have my citizenship back home because I am never there. She knew it right away.

(My athletics academic advisor) did my schedule and put me in classes that were really basic that she knew I was going to be able to succeed in...I put myself in a really hard major and like she was like, "Are you sure you want to do that?" When I said, "yes" she was like, "OK, well, I am going to do the best I can to help you, but it is going to be hard." She told me up front what it was going to be and what I was getting myself into and with (her sport) how much of a time commitment it was and all of that stuff. She really made sure

that I was keeping up with my grades, and she said I was doing fine. I felt a lot of trust and I feel like if it was someone else, it would have been very different. They would probably put me in a different major I'm pretty sure.

Coco expressed a concern of hers in attending an institution in the United States was the distance from her family, specifically home sicknesses. Coco's family tried to combat the issue by purchasing a computer so they could Skype with her and to use other forms of social media. Coco described how she communicated with her family:

My dad got me a brand-new computer before I came, and it was really nice so we could Skype...this whole communication thing, it was by Skype....It really helped feeling like I could still talk to them....I didn't get a phone plan with international calls...I go home for Christmas for the 10 days that we have, and I go home in the summer...My freshman year, I went home for a month, so that was nice... after my freshman year, the whole I am homesick thing, I was fine. Like when I am home, I am excited to come back here.

As Coco discussed, she had access to technology and transportation that individuals who come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may not have accessible. For example, Coco was able to travel back to her native country multiple times a year and Skype with her family which can help with homesickness.

Athletically, Coco had an adjustment period in addition to trying to interact with teammates who speak English. In her native country, competing in athletics while representing a school is extremely rare. Coco was used to essentially competing for herself with no fanfare. NCAA athletics in the United States was new for her, and she had to overcome the entire new sporting setup:

I don't think I really understood it until it was season my freshman year...To see people to come to watch us and you are representing your school against other schools. It's not just you anymore. That was very different. I've never been in something like that. Even in club, you represent your club but I think you really represent yourself...It's very different to in (her home country), we don't have that much, pride in who we represent.

When Coco participated in this study she was in the first semester of her junior year. Her post-graduation plans at that time were undecided. When she first planned to come to the United States for college she wanted to return to her native country immediately after graduation. However, those plans somewhat changed despite her long-term vision being undefined. Ultimately, Coco wanted to attend a professional school in her native country to be a practicing veterinarian. Coco explained her plans after graduation, *“I am probably going to stay in the States. I wish I could stay in the States and be in a show in Vegas for maybe two years. Then, after that, I am planning on going back home and finish my school.”*

While Coco discussed a vast array of topics relating to her experiences, a summarization of her story relating to opportunity, process, and adjustment will better help the reader reflect on the data presented. The three themes of opportunity, process, and adjustment were derived from analysis of the data provided by all the participants. An overview of how Coco viewed her opportunity to attend an institution in the United States precedes summaries of the process she discussed to be eligible, and the adjustment period she experienced at the institution.

Opportunity

Coco viewed the opportunity to attend an institution in the United States as a chance to continue her athletics career. Coco noted that she was planning on attending an institution in her native country before learning she could compete athletically in the United States. The other benefits she viewed from coming to the United States (improving English, traveling, and new experiences) were secondary to her desire to continue to participate in athletics. Coco also viewed her academic interests as secondary to receiving an athletics scholarship

from the institution in this study. She said it was a bonus that the school she ultimately attended offered a program that would help her become a practicing veterinarian.

Process

Coco relied heavily on athletics as the avenue to gain access to the institution in this study. The coaches at her club and another club provided guidance on how to get in contact with college coaches in the United States and market herself. With the assistance of these coaches, Kevin was able to communicate with Coco's family via e-mail and telephone to express interest. Kevin viewed video and attended a practice session to gauge Coco's athletic talent. After Coco received and accepted a scholarship offer from Kevin, the coaching staff became Coco's advisor on gaining eligibility with the NCAA and admittance to the institution in this study. Coco did not reference seeking assistance from anyone from the university outside of athletics during the time period of gaining admittance to the institution. It appears Coco's first interaction with non-athletics-related-university staff was after arriving on campus.

Adjustment

Coco referenced the value of attending a summer course prior to her freshman year, but she was the only participant in this study who had access to that opportunity. After arriving on campus, English was a major hurdle for Coco to being at ease socially, athletically, and academically. Coco said her teammates, other international student-athletes, the office to aid international students, and her academic advisor assisted tremendously during her freshman year. As referenced by Kevin, Coco made great progress socially,

athletically, and academically as she become more comfortable with speaking English and the university experience as a whole.

Abby

Abby is from a South American country and plays the same sport as Sylvia at the institution in this study. Abby's sport is an individual sport that the NCAA has added a team component through scoring to allow for institutions to compete against each other. Abby's sport requires a financial commitment to improve that is greater than other sports like track and field or soccer. However, Abby's level of socioeconomic upbringing was not apparent during the research process. One could assume her family was at least middle class simply based on the coaching, equipment, travel, and facility use costs associated with improving in her sport.

Abby was exposed to the blending of academics and athletics in the United States many years before she graduated from high school. Abby first became aware of the opportunity by competing in competitions in her sport and having athletes come back from the United States and discuss their experiences. Abby explained that there are not many athletes who play her sport at a high level in her native country, so she would find herself competing against the same individuals and developing a rapport with them. Through her relationships with similar high-level athletes in her sport and the exposure to those who had returned from the United States, Abby was intrigued. Abby described what appealed to her in coming to the United States:

I always thought about coming to the States to study here because it's a great opportunity to get a good education and also play sport...This is one of the few countries that actually do it. Because back at home, at least, we don't

have the chance of playing, in my case (the sport she plays), and go to school at the same time and play for the school and practice and train every day.

Abby presented other reasons for being interesting in coming to the United States that differed from playing her sport. Abby did not seem to place sport as the first reason she wanted to come to the United States; it was more the combination of opportunities:

I wanted to come here for the education because it is a really good school. I think I could be able to get at home because we have really good schools. But, if I go back home after school and I have a degree from here, and I also know another language, which is English...if I have the same major as one other kid from home, but I have it from here and he has it from, whatever school in (her home country), it is going to be different if we apply to the same job. I am going to have more experience. I don't know how to say it, but people in companies, they don't only look at the degree, they could look at that I have two languages....I know I have the experience of living by myself...and also being a student-athlete, which is really complicated to do because we have to do good in school and in sports to keep being able to stay on the team.

Because she was exposed to the idea of coming to the United States years before she graduated from high school, Abby had time to prepare for the recruitment and application process. Abby's first step was researching different universities online and what she would need to do to make her dream a reality. Abby continually talked with the other athletes in her sport who were either considering coming to the United States or who already had about what she could do to increase her odds of attending a university in the United States. Abby studied for the SAT and TOEFL examinations while in high school and took the tests during her senior year. Abby also needed to fill out paperwork for the NCAA to indicate she had not received money for any of the tournaments she had competed in during high school or that she had hired an agent at any time. Abby's major difficulty was in processing the paperwork because she had to translate from her native language to English before providing it to the NCAA. Abby wanted to make sure she did not have any mistakes because of having

to translate to English, so she hired a translation company. Abby described her frustrations during this time of the process:

That was a pain because I had to take all that stuff to the translator and then take it back and then send it by mail and by e-mail and pay for all that. I had to pay for the SAT which was expensive and then go to another city to take the test because it was only in the capital in (her home country) where I was going to be able to take it. Then I also had to take the TOEFL which was about like 180 dollars and I wasn't lucky the first time. I didn't pass it (laughs) because my English was pretty bad. And then, I had to take it again, so I had to pay for it again.

As previously stated, Abby knew many of the high-level athletes in her sport from her country because there were so few, which helped her initially. However, following the advice of others proved to have its drawbacks. Abby decided to attend an institution in the United States simply because she had a friend that was already attending it. She assumed everything would be fine but had not really researched the school, the team, or the coach. Abby explained the issues she had at the first institution she attended in the United States:

I was expecting to get a better school because that school was kind of small, and they didn't have engineering. I didn't know a lot about how the schools work and how the (sport she plays) works. The NCAA, I didn't really know about that... When I had the chance to go there and then I got there, I started majoring in business. I was like, "This is not what I really want because I really want engineering." It wasn't what I was expecting because I had a bad experience with my coach there and my teammates. I didn't like my team at all... My coach... He stole my scholarship money. So, that is why I transferred and then he got fired of course. After that, there was a really long NCAA investigation.

After leaving her first institution in the United States, Abby was forced to return to her native country because she no longer was attending a school. Further adding to her difficulties was that Abby needed to find a new school to attend that would also offer her a scholarship and accomplish it all again from her home in South America. Abby again turned to her friends and coaches in her sport in her native country to find an institution in the

United States she could attend on an athletics scholarship. After attending a school that did not offer her major, Abby made a priority of only entertaining offers from schools that had engineering programs. A friend of Abby's knew Steve (her current coach at the institution in this study) and recommended he recruit her. Steve provided information about Abby's recruitment:

Actually, it was kind of interesting. I didn't know anything about her. When I was at (another school), I recruited a kid from (Abby's native country) and then when I got (to his current institution) I e-mailed him and said, "If you have any friends that want to come let me know." One day he e-mailed me back and said, "Hey, this girl from (Abby's native country) wants to transfer. You should look at her." I started communicating with her... We started first to get her e-mail, which we couldn't. So, I sent her an e-mail through Facebook and she got back to me. Then we started the process of calling her and all that stuff.

After receiving a scholarship offer from Steve, Abby researched the institution in this study and determined it would be where she would want to conclude her athletics and academic career. She did not travel to campus for a visit or communicate with anyone at the university other than Steve during the decision-making process. Steve did not travel to meet her or watch her play other than what he could access through video. She was not recruited by another school during the timeframe between institutions either. Abby commented that her time home during the transition between the two schools was difficult and stressful. She believed she had failed in her dream and that it would be incredibly difficult to find another institution that would offer her a scholarship. The offer she received from Steve was still an emotional topic for Abby during her participation in this study because she viewed it as a second chance.

Because Abby had already spent a summer at another institution in the United States before transferring to the one in this study, her initial adjustment period had differences from

other international student-athletes. The first institution Abby attended in the United States was in the southern region of the United States, which had its own cultural differences that are separate from the institution in this study. The institution in this study is in the Midwest and Abby said the accent in that region is much easier for her to understand, *“First thing is, the language. When I first went to (the state of her previous institution) my English was really bad. And the southern accent was killing me. So, the language is the first thing that has an impact on you.”*

The second area of difference for Abby was how her schoolwork and athletics were blended into how she organized her day:

It’s just different coming from high school where it’s like “it’s just high school and you don’t have to worry about it too much.” Then when you are here, you realize you have to take your classes, do good in school and at the same time go to practice every day. You can’t be late. You can’t just say, “Oh, I’m not going to play today. I’m just not going to practice.” ...I need to take more responsibilities for just being on the team than just being in high school where you practice by yourself and you compete by yourself, at least in my case.

Abby pointed out the difference in the weather between the institution in this study and her native country. She had experienced four distinct seasons in her native country, similar to what occurs at the institution in this study. However, a long, harsh winter was a change for Abby and she said she struggled considerably during her first winter at the institution in this study. Abby had been able to fly home to see her family during winter and summer breaks. Despite having access to her family via travel and Skype, Abby did initially struggle with the distance from home:

It’s really tough for me at least because I’m pretty close to my family. So, being away from them, it’s been really rough... I had to get used to it, but it’s just hard to be away from home and in a different country. You don’t have your friends either. So, you kind of have to start a new life and just once you start it you have to enjoy it because if you don’t you’re going to have a bad time.

An area that helped Abby immensely when she arrived at the institution in this study was the support she received from the office to aid international students. Abby did not have access to a similar office at her previous institution that she recalled. Abby described the importance of the office to aid international students:

The school has an international student office or council I would say. They have all the international students go there to take care of their taxes, or the visa or the I-20 which is the paper from the school that allows you to get the student visa. I've been going there a lot to take care of that stuff. I've had the chances to meet a lot of international people...One of the reasons why I've been meeting other international students is because I go a lot to the international student office and sometimes I ask them if they know other people from my country.

Abby also cited her teammates as being beneficial in helping her adjust to the new “society” at the institution in this study:

I feel like just by being (at her current institution) on the team, I've met more people through sport than I think I could meet just by being a normal student. I've been traveling all around the United States, so also that's one more thing that helps you to grow up.

Conversely, Abby discussed that being a member of an athletics team potentially hindered her from experiencing the time she often needed to excel academically:

When I wish I wasn't a student-athlete sometimes it is when I have a lot of school stuff to do, and I need time to do it or to have more time to study or to have free afternoon to meet with your group to make projects or actually do homework....that is when I say sometimes I wish I wasn't a student-athlete. More than that, I mean, this is all that I have been dreaming of my life, so I think other than that I can't say I wish I wasn't a student-athlete. Because this is my dream, so I am living it.

Abby participated in this study at the beginning of her junior year. Her plans after graduation were not determined when she participated in this study, and she mentioned she did not have post-graduation plans before coming to the United States. Abby explained in detail her plans:

I think, for me at least, this opportunity it already changed my life in a good way of course...I could say yes (returning to her native country), that's my plan. I can't say that right now because I still have two more years. But, yeah, I think I could go home. Maybe not right after I graduate but a couple years because I kind want to have work experience here and then go back home.

The section detailing Abby's experiences before, during, and after her time at the institution in this study concludes with a summary. To summarize her experiences, the conclusion is divided into three areas: *opportunity*, *process*, and *transition*.

Opportunity

Abby learned of the opportunity to attend an institution in the United States on an athletics scholarship because she competed against the same high-level athletes in her sport from her native country. The other athletes she got to know expressed interest in coming to the United States, and Abby even knew athletes who had attended a university on an athletics scholarship. Abby was drawn to the opportunity for a variety of reasons. She indicated that while athletics was important to her and the vehicle that afforded her the opportunity, Abby wanted to improve her English skills, earn a degree from a university in the United States, travel, and live in a different country because she believed she would be more marketable when applying for jobs when she returned to her native country.

Process

Abby began the eligibility process prior to the start of her senior year of high school by studying for both the SAT and TOEFL examinations while researching schools online. Despite her preparations for the examinations, Abby did not pass the TOEFL on her first attempt. She also had a negative experience at her first institution because it did not offer her

intended major (engineering) and she described her coach as having stolen her scholarship money. Abby left her first school and returned back to her native country with no options. She restarted the recruitment process. She had a friend in her native country who knew Steve (the coach at the institution in this study) and recommended he recruit Abby. After initial conversations, Steve offered Abby a scholarship which she accepted after researching the institution in this study online. Abby did not go on a campus visit or meet Steve in person prior to starting classes at the university.

Adjustment

Abby struggled to adjust to her first institution in the United States, which ultimately led to her leaving that school. Abby cited her teammates, language issues, lack of her intended major, and her coach as components that led to leaving. At the institution in this study, Abby lauded the office to aid international students as helping her considerably. She also had a much stronger relationship with her teammates and coaches than she did at her first school. Abby continues to have issues with not being able to see her family that she is close to, but she does travel back to her native country multiple times a year and communicated with friends and family via various forms of technology.

Sylvia

Sylvia plays a highly individual sport that has a team component created by the NCAA. Sylvia and Abby compete in the same sport. The sport Sylvia competes in is not as expensive to train in as others may be, but there is enough of a financial commitment required to improve that very few individuals from low-socioeconomic backgrounds achieve success. During the meetings for this study, Sylvia wore clothing and spoke of experiences

during her life that would suggest her family has some level of financial comfort. Sylvia is from a nation in northwestern Europe that is not a third-world country. Sylvia's socioeconomic background is important to consider while reading about why she decided to come to an institution in the United States, and how she was relatively prepared for the cultural differences.

Prior to graduating high school, Sylvia was unsure of her future goals. She mentioned she was "burned out" from her sport and had not considered playing after high school. However, two weeks after deciding she was done playing her sport, Sylvia came to the conclusion she missed it dearly and wanted to continue competing. She had been playing her sport since she was six years old, and it was a major component of her identity. After deciding she wanted to continue competing in her sport, Sylvia was attracted to coming to a university in the United States. Sylvia said it was common for successful athletes in her country who play her sport to attend a university in the United States:

Back home there's a lot of (people who compete in her sport) that go to the States, so it is a thing that is kind of popular (in her sport) community back home that people would go to the States after they were done in high school. They want to pursue their dream to continue, to do school and (her sport).

Sylvia referenced how rare of an opportunity it is to pair athletics with education, specifically in Europe. The opportunity to accomplish both simultaneously was appealing and the main reason she wanted to come to the United States:

...That's just an American thing. You won't find that in Europe. You play for yourself, your country. (Sylvia's sport) is an individual sport first of all. So, you play for yourself and then you have, we call it a club....you pay the coach, you pay everything.

As Sylvia indicated, her primary interest in attending an institution in the United States was for the opportunity to continue playing the sport she had competed in since she was six years old. Other reasons existed for why Sylvia wanted to receive an education in the United States that she expressed:

Going to the United States, it sounded fun and it's a great opportunity because if you don't want to go professional you can go to the States and you can combine school and (her sport)... I heard that (the school system in the United States) is really good...even though I like my school system back home too...I had no idea what I wanted to study and that you can come here and take all these different classes...back home, you can't do that. You go straight into business school. You go straight into psychology or med school.

An area that was not one of the reasons for Sylvia's interest in receiving an education in the United States was improving her English skills. In Sylvia's native country, English is taught as early as kindergarten and progresses all the way through high school. Sylvia explained she was required to take six hours of English a week during middle school, and she continued taking it in high school. Sylvia commented that English has always been her second language. As a result, Sylvia was confident in her English-speaking skills and improving in that area was not part of why she wanted to attend an institution in the United States.

After deciding she wanted to pursue the opportunity of pairing her education while playing her sport in the United States, Sylvia had a lengthy process ahead of her. She had already graduated from high school, so she knew she had one year to get everything in order. Sylvia first turned to her coaches and colleagues who knew of other athletes from her country who came to the United States to attend an institution. Sylvia said the individuals who initially helped her were invaluable, and they told her to begin e-mailing coaches in the United States. Sylvia described how she began marketing herself:

I started sending out e-mails to different schools in the States, just writing about myself, sending in rankings, achievements, just everything I've been doing in (her native country) and in Europe. First, I sent out the e-mails without any videos and no one did reply. Then, I figured out, "Oh, gosh, I need to make a video." I asked different agencies to help through the process of getting in touch with different colleges. I figured out it was just something I felt like I needed to do by myself. So, then I made a video by myself playing (her sport). Then, I posted that and I sent that again out to different schools. Then more people and more schools replied back to me that time, and then everything suddenly started snowballing.

After receiving interest from multiple schools, Sylvia committed to an institution different from the one in this study. However, her initial commitment did not last because the coach who recruited her was fired. The coach who initially recruited Sylvia was eventually hired as an assistant coach at the institution in this study. Soon the assistant coach at the institution in this study began recruiting Sylvia to attend his new university. The timeframe between when the coach was fired and before he started recruiting her at another school was stressful for Sylvia. Because she had committed to the first institution, the other schools that were recruiting her moved on and filled their scholarship allotments. As a result, Sylvia had few options and her time was running thin.

Sylvia explained that no coach traveled to see her play. She was judged based on her videos, rankings, and achievements. Despite attracting interest from the institution in this study, Sylvia knew little about the school and community while she was deciding what university to attend:

To be honest, I had no idea where [The state her institution is in] was. I knew it was in the States but I have never heard about it. So, I was like, "(The coach) is going there" and I was kind of desperate because then when I said I was going to (the coach's school)...so I was like, "I am just going to go with it and it's going to be an experience anyway." ...so I just signed.

Sylvia stated that without a scholarship offer to play her sport she would have had no interest in attending the institution in this study. She said she would have found a different school to attend that was offering a scholarship.

Sylvia accepted the scholarship offer but still needed to pass all the necessary entrance examinations and NCAA eligibility requirements. Sylvia's first hurdle was the SAT, which she eventually took three times before earning a high enough score to be admitted to the institution in this study. Sylvia described the difficulties she experienced because of the SAT:

(The SAT) was just a different setup. I've never seen a bubble sheet before I took the SAT test because back home we don't do that...when you have exams or tests you write. You sit there for five hours or an hour and you write up the answers.

In addition to passing the SAT, Sylvia had to earn an adequate score on the TOEFL. Sylvia elected to take the TOEFL in a different country than where she lived because her boyfriend was living abroad at the time. On reflection, Sylvia believed she put herself in a disadvantage by taking the TOEFL in a different country because no one in the test-taking room spoke her native language. Despite the difficulties, Sylvia earned a high enough score on the TOEFL to earn admittance to the institution in this study. The next hurdle Sylvia had to overcome was an NCAA requirement to understand its rules and submit high school transcripts. Sylvia described this part of the eligibility process:

I had to go through the NCAA rules that was online. I had to sign up and then all these things I had to do. I had to sign in my transcripts from high school and also tenth grade which is... I don't know how to describe it because the school systems are different back home, but three years of middle school and then three years of high school and my last year of middle school I had to send that in too...I had to go through all these different questions that if I played professionally, where have I played, have I received money.

Sylvia was sent the I-20 documents by the university's athletics department, and she did not have any issues completing the form on time and properly. Another area that was of little difficulty to Sylvia was receiving a visa from her native country to come to the United States. Sylvia described getting the visa as, "I signed up for an appointment in the capital of (her home country). Then, I went there, got my visa and then I was ready to go."

Prior to traveling to the United States, Sylvia's dorm assignment and food plan was set up through the athletics department. On her second day at the university, Sylvia met with her athletics department academic advisor. Sylvia explained how she signed up for classes:

My second day I met with my athletic advisor. She was asking me, "Do you know kind of what major you want?"...then I was set up for (general classes for her major). I got another advisor in the (her major) building...both my athletic advisor and my advisor in the (her major) building helped with my classes... Then, the next week I was just going to class.

Sylvia's parents traveled with her to campus originally and proved to be helpful in her acclimation. Sylvia specifically credited her parents with setting up her bank account and cell phone plan in the United States. They also bought her a new computer to help communication with them while Sylvia attended the institution in this study.

After she arrived on campus, Sylvia said the biggest adjustment for her was English. She had great confidence in her English skills prior to traveling to the United States because of how prevalent the language was in her native country, specifically in school. Sylvia mentioned she had better English skills than the other international student-athletes on her team at the institution in this study, but she still had trying times. Sylvia explained some of her initial English-related experiences:

During the first month my freshman year I was struggling in classes...in lectures because they went really fast and by taking notes in English I didn't know if I should take notes in (her native language) or if I should take the

notes in English. When I had one word down, it was gone to the next page of the PowerPoint. I thought it was not working so then I figured out I was just going to sit and listen first and don't take any notes...I was exhausted by six or eight in the afternoon...The reading part; reading the books took me ages.

In addition to in the classroom, English had a negative impact on Sylvia's initial social experiences at the institution in this study:

I was scared. I am pretty much an outgoing person...When I got (to her current institution), I was like, "Oh, gosh, your English is not good. They won't understand you. What if you are saying something wrong or if you have wrong grammar?" I still have the wrong grammar...I'm still a little afraid to put myself out there because I am afraid to say the wrong thing...if I give a presentation then I always get more nervous than if it was a (her native country).

While her English skills hindered her initially socially and academically, Sylvia believed being a member of a team was immensely beneficial. Having the built-in network and ability to learn from other international student-athletes on her team had a positive impact on Sylvia. She explained the benefits to her of being on a team:

It was actually really great to have a team because this is such a big school. It's harder to make friends...the fact that I had the team that I could go straight into they had to take care of me...especially being with the Americans, talking with them made me a better English speaker...If I didn't have anyone, I probably would be struggling a little bit more. I don't know how to put it, but it's not easy when you have nobody. I literally had no idea where I was or what the whole school was about.

An area of adjustment that did not have a pronounced impact on Sylvia was homesickness. She was used to traveling and spending time away from her family prior to coming to the United States after spending three years at an academy during high school. Sylvia travels back to her native country during winter break for three weeks and is able to communicate with her family members frequently through the internet and on the telephone. She said she utilizes Skype three to four times a week to see her parents and other family

members. In regard to being apart from her family, Sylvia mentioned that the time-zone difference was the biggest adjustment. To not have the ability to call her family whenever she wanted was difficult.

Upon reflection, Sylvia expressed gratitude for the benefits she received as a student-athlete at the institution in this study. However, Sylvia expressed the difficulties of being a student-athlete that many people do not recognize, stating that others only are aware of the benefits:

(Being a student-athlete) is hard work and I know a lot of other students think "Oh, you're a student-athlete, oh, you're cool or whatever." It's like they think it's easy, but it's not...It's rough. It is up and down. It is a lot of practice and there's a lot of motivation you have to keep up all the time...I should have a lot of projects or internships that I should have done...that I don't have a chance to do that because I really don't have time...that is a downside to things a bit. Also, during the summer you have to work out, you have to stay on your game. So, that means I am not able to do a full internship...because I have to practice.

In line with how her time constraints have limited her ability to participate in an internship or have access to projects, Sylvia believed she was behind on her post-graduation plans. Sylvia mentioned she saw other students in her major who had much better resumes, and she would have considerable ground to make up after she graduated. Sylvia's original plan was to play professionally in her sport and pursue a different academic major. Sylvia's tentative plans have changed:

I really like the States and since I am in (her major) that's a big thing in the States. There is so much you can do with it here. I would love to, my dream would be going to New York and work there for two years, maybe more. Maybe just a year to get a great experience and that would be amazing in my field...I am definitely going to move back to (her home country) because I love it.

As with all the participants' experiences in this study, a brief summarization of Sylvia's story concludes this section. The conclusion is divided into three parts: *opportunity*, *process*, and *adjustment* to help the reader's reflection on Sylvia's experiences. The importance of Sylvia's relatively high socioeconomic upbringing is an important factor to consider when reflecting on the three areas of summarization.

Opportunity

After deciding she wanted to continue competing in her sport but not playing professionally after high-school graduation, Sylvia explored the opportunity of attending a university in the United States on an athletics scholarship. She had heard of the pairing of athletics and academics because other athletes from her sport in her native country had done it before her. Sylvia was also attracted to the opportunity because she was intrigued by the schooling system in the United States that would allow her to find what her career passion was because in her native country she would have to know after high school graduation. The prospect of living in the United States and having a new experience enticed Sylvia as well. Sylvia commented that she would only attend an institution in the United States that offered her a full athletics scholarship.

Process

Once she determined she wanted to attend an institution in the United States, Sylvia had to wait a full year because she had already graduated from high school. She first asked people in her native country what the first step was, and they told her to e-mail coaches in the United States. After receiving little interest from coaches, Sylvia created a recruiting video that she included in e-mails and then she started hearing back from schools. Sylvia originally

committed to a different institution than the one in this study but had her scholarship offer rescinded because the coach was fired. She was eventually recruited by the institution in this study after the coach at the original school was hired as an assistant coach. After being offered a scholarship to the institution in this study, Sylvia had to take the SAT three times to earn a high enough score for admittance. Despite struggling on the TOEFL exam, Sylvia scored high enough. She then completed the required NCAA eligibility forms and transcription submissions online. Sylvia expressed no issues with receiving a visa from her native country or filling out the I-20 form.

Adjustment

Sylvia's adjustment was initially aided by the athletics department at the institution in this study setting up her dormitory and meal plans. Having her parents travel with her to the United States also helped Sylvia in many ways that included setting up a bank account and a cell phone. Sylvia's main struggle was the lack of confidence she had with her English skills both in the classroom and socially. Sylvia noted that being a member of a team was vital to her adjustment. She did not have any issues with being away from her parents for an extended period of time because of her time at a high school academy and how accessible they were both on the phone and Skype. Furthermore, Sylvia traveled back to her native country during winter break as well as during the summer to spend time with her family and friends.

Jimmy

Jimmy's native country is located in Western Europe, and he plays a highly individual sport. The sport Jimmy plays requires considerable financial investment for

equipment, coaching, access to training facilities, and travel. Because of the financial considerations required to train at the high level Jimmy does, one can deduce he did not grow up in a low socioeconomic environment. Furthermore, Jimmy attended an international school during high school that allowed him increased access to train for his sport. Jimmy's experience at the international school impacted his initial experience when attending the institution in this study and will be discussed later in this section. Jimmy's socioeconomic upbringing and his experiences at the international high school should be considered when analyzing his experiences at the institution in this study.

Jimmy learned of the opportunity to attend a university in the United States and representing that institution in athletics from a teammate. At the time, Jimmy was at an international school and highly regarded in his country because of the sport he plays. Jimmy was one of the top-ranked players in his sport for his age in his native country. Despite being highly regarded, Jimmy did not want to become a professional athlete in his sport following high school graduation. He had not considered the opportunity to come to the United States until the later stages of his senior year of high school. Jimmy explained this time of his life:

My friend back in home, I was in the situation where I wasn't sure if I should just stay because I was studying at an international school in (a large city 5 hours away from where he grew up but still in his native country)...and my friend just opened my eyes. It looked like the best opportunity to go and improve your game was in the States and you are going to play against the best players. All the (names the top league in the United States) players, they have been through, this college career thing.

Jimmy explained in more detail that he foremost had an interest in coming to the United States to improve in his sport. The access to facilities and better coaching was a major reason:

I consider myself more of an athlete than a student right now (laughs) because that is really what I want to do; base my career on sport...and having the opportunity to play and study at the same time without having any confrontation and you always have a lot of facilities to, to help you get through them in a good way, you have tutors for school, you've got coach for practice, you've got athletic trainer for the gym. Everything's really well-organized in trying to reach your potential in both aspects.

In addition to having the opportunity to attend an institution in the United States and continue to improve in sport, Jimmy was attracted by the scholarship. Jimmy explained the importance of a scholarship in his decision-making process:

There are scholarships here and there (in his native country) but not that many, like over here. There's no N C double A (NCAA) foundation that gives you any scholarships. It's just (his native country) Federation...it's all by yourself and you have to travel by yourself, but that's a lot of money. For that, a lot of people say, "If I am going to pay for the (competitions) by myself, I may as well just turn pro and try to at least get the money back some way." That's why a lot of people just either quit or just focus on school or the opposite.

Jimmy explained multiple other secondary reasons he was interested in attending an institution in the United States:

I do everything in (his native language) back home and it's always going to help you improve the English. It's always going to help you out there in the world if you know two languages really. Also, having a degree from the States is going to help you out when you go back home and looking for jobs or anything it is going to give you a lot of prestige there...just learning other philosophies and another way of life over here that's another thing that's interesting.

Jimmy was a member of the national team in his native country for the sport he plays. As a result, Jimmy had close relationships with the members of his national sporting federation and even referenced that it was like a "family." By being a member of the national federation, Jimmy was exposed to other high-achieving players in his sport who had

received interest in coming to the United States and coaches who urged him to consider the option.

Despite having the interest in attending the United States while still in high school, Jimmy was not able to begin move to a university right after high school. Because Jimmy did not decide he wanted to attend an institution in the United States until the last months of his time in high school he was too far behind in the recruiting and eligibility process. Jimmy had not been offered a scholarship, cleared with the NCAA, or taken the ACT/SAT to receive admission to an institution in the United States. In the year between high school graduation and eventually coming to the United States, Jimmy was recruited by colleges. Jimmy explained how coaches first started to contact him:

I would just randomly get an e-mail from someone or I remember applying for a couple colleges....A few of my teammates back in (his home country) were studying (in the United States) and they were in other states. I talked to them in the summer and said, "Look, I am interested in going to the States." They talked to their coach and then it kind of just spreads. I am not sure how it works and I got a couple e-mails here and there. They try to reply but they can't really because the (NCAA), they can't really contact you that easily.

Jimmy's coach (Brett) at the institution in this study provided more specific detail regarding Jimmy's recruitment and how he first learned of him:

In (Jimmy's) case, I printed out the (country Jimmy is from) rankings, took it to (another player on the team from Jimmy's home country) and said (to the player), "Who do you know?" He pointed to (Jimmy) and said, "Hey, I know this guy. He's really good. He's a good kid. I think he might be interested." It was good because (Jimmy's teammate) understood since he had been (at his institution) for a year what it took. So, he could help say, "Yep, (Jimmy's) a good candidate for college." Versus, "Ahh, that kid, no chance. He doesn't have the academics." So, that becomes a big part of it is trying to filter who is a great fit for college and so in Jimmy's situation that's kind of how it started.

After e-mail correspondence, phone calls, and Skype Jimmy eventually accepted Brett's scholarship offer to attend the institution despite receiving interest from a number of different coaches. After accepting the scholarship offer, Jimmy had to earn an acceptable SAT score to gain admittance to the institution in this study. Jimmy did not earn a high enough score on his first test, so he had to re-take the SAT and improve on vocabulary. Jimmy explained that he was not used to multiple-choice questions on exams as well as the different meanings for English words and those factors contributed to his low first score on the SAT. Jimmy knew that if he did not have an improved score on the second SAT attempt, he would not be able to attend the institution in this study during the upcoming academic school year. Despite the immense pressure to score well on his second attempt, Jimmy improved on the SAT and gained admittance to the institution in this study. Jimmy said he did not have any issues regarding NCAA eligibility or obtaining a visa from his native country to attend an institution in the United States.

Jimmy arrived at the campus of the institution in this study three days before classes began. For someone who had never been to the United States, Jimmy experienced many differences from what he was used to in his native country. When describing the differences, Jimmy first gravitated toward discussing athletics:

Everything was just shocking because all the facilities, everything that is just given to you just to help you reach your potential was just really exciting because back in (his native country) you have to do everything for yourself....Here, you get to practice, coach says "We have to do this, this and this." It's just really organized.

Jimmy quickly noticed differences regarding how classes were taught and administered compared to what he had experienced in his native country. Jimmy explained the differences:

(In the United States) classes are really ongoing. You have a little bit of homework every day which helps you keep an eye on what you're doing. When you are in (my native country), you don't have any homework kind of thing. It's not like you have a homework or quiz due or whatever. It's all focus on a test. Most colleges in (his native country) are people just study like a month for the test, take the test and then they go a month off but then they have to go another month, study and take the test... We don't have a campus back home... classes in college are just like mixed with the city. Whereas (at his current institution) you have the campus and you have (the local city) kind of around it a little bit... Also, the tests are multiple choice here. Back home in (Jimmy's native country), we write everything down.

Jimmy also expressed multiple cultural differences in the United States:

There's a lot more fast food here... then the eating hours are really early in the morning... we stay in bed a little longer. Workouts in the morning at 6 a.m. it's a big change for me. Also, having dinner at 5 p.m. is pretty weird for me because we normally have dinner at 8, 9, 10... It was kind of weird because I normally go to bed at 10, 11 and when you have dinner at 5 I am normally hungry again. So, I normally have three to four meals.

Despite attending an international school where English was spoken and growing up in a household where the language was also utilized, Jimmy experienced a transition period with regard to English in the United States. Jimmy mentioned that when he returns back to his native country for any period of time he notices that he struggles with his English when he comes back to the United States. Jimmy also said certain words in classes confused him, but he did not have a tremendous amount of difficulty with English.

Jimmy's adjustment to living in the United States and attending the university in this study was aided by being a member of a team. Jimmy was particularly fortunate because he knew members of the team prior to attending the college that not only helped his recruitment but his adjustment. Furthermore, having attended the international school prior to traveling to the United States allowed Jimmy to experience living away from his family, so he did not have homesickness issues. Jimmy explained the importance of being on team:

I hang out with my teammates a lot. It's like, it's a family. You share your problems, your good stuff, you just share everything really. Because all of your family and friends are back home, you can't really talk to them as much. Maybe a little bit of Skype here and there but, it's not the same person to person...we had a lot of (international student-athletes on his team) freshman that year, so we were all in the same boat. We helped each other out

Jimmy participated in this study at the beginning of his junior year at the institution. Prior to attending the university in this study, Jimmy was solely focused on playing professionally in his sport after graduation. While his primary goal has not changed, Jimmy is entertaining other post-graduation opportunities. Jimmy explained what he intends to do after graduation:

It hasn't changed...I see a bit more staying around here in the States, either playing or working. My objective is to try to play some professional. America suits (the way he plays his sport). I think I want to try to play professional (Jimmy names the top American league in his sport) if I can. It's a little vague, I'm not sure what to do. I could go back, back to (Jimmy's home country). It's just depends how everything works out with the sport...I definitely see a bigger option now of coming to the States to work (or compete in his sport).

A brief overview of three areas of summary: *opportunity*, *process*, and *adjustment* follows to help the reader review and reflect on Jimmy's story and experiences.

Opportunity

Jimmy had heard of coming to the United States to continue competing in his sport and to receive an education long before he seriously considered it an option. Jimmy was initially exposed to the opportunity from teammates and coaches. He eventually viewed attending an institution in the United States as a vehicle to help him improve in his sport by having access to stiffer competition and enhanced facilities. Improving his English, experiencing a new culture, and earning a degree from an institution in the United States

were of secondary interest to Jimmy. Jimmy still plans to play professionally in his sport after graduation but is entertaining other options including working in the United States.

Process

Jimmy began the process of attending an institution in the United States by first being exposed to the idea by his teammates and coaches in his native country. Jimmy did not seriously consider the opportunity until late in his senior year of high school. Because he did not begin the process until so late, Jimmy had to wait one year after high school graduation before coming to the United States. Jimmy's coach at the institution in this study, Brett, learned of Jimmy through a player already on the team at the university who knew Jimmy and because Jimmy was nationally ranked. Brett began recruiting Jimmy who eventually accepted the scholarship offer. Jimmy had nervous times during the recruitment process in regard to his SAT score to gain admittance to the university in this study. Jimmy had to take the SAT a second time and needed a higher score to have the opportunity to attend the institution in this study. Jimmy earned a high enough score and traveled to the United States three days before his first class.

Adjustment

Jimmy credits attending an international school in his native country during his high school years with helping prepare to live in the United States. Jimmy specifically attributed adjusting relatively easily to being a long distance from his family and English to having attended the international school. Jimmy expressed some difficulty in experiencing the new cultural norms in the United States regarding sleeping and eating patterns as well as the different education philosophy. Jimmy was not used to consistent homework and multiple

choice tests prior to coming to the United States. Jimmy believed being a member of a team was very beneficial to helping him acculturate to living in the United States and attending the institution in this study.

Martha

Martha is from an African country and participates in a sport that requires little financing and is highly individualistic in nature. Martha had the opportunity to train for her sport with little coaching necessary or having to join a club. Based on my interactions with Martha and the information she divulged about her family, I believe she was raised in a low-socioeconomic environment. Later in this section more information is presented regarding how Martha's socioeconomic background impacted her regarding how she treated the opportunity to attend the institution in this study, her recruitment process, and the adjustment period she experienced. This section will follow a relatively chronological order, starting with how Martha first learned of the opportunity to attend an institution in the United States.

In Martha's native country, access to higher education is limited for a variety of reasons. Many people live in low socioeconomic conditions and do not consider attending college because they need to work. Furthermore, many people in Martha's country do not have parents or friends who attended college so the exposure to higher education is limited. Education prior to college can often be of limited importance because in Martha's home country the parents are required to pay for the children's education because of the lack of government assistance. Martha explained how higher education is viewed:

The thing is we still have problems in (her native country)...people like to go to school but they don't have the money for it. They don't have money to pay for their school fees, to buy the books, and everything. So, people are just like starting with a lot of difficulties. To do studying, especially going to a

university...it's really a big deal...they call people and are like, "this person from this house is like going to this university." In my village, I can count like six people in the whole village who are in a university.

During high school Martha was not sure what her plans were after her graduation. She knew attending a university in her native country was unlikely. However, she wanted to do something different than trying to find work but was not sure what opportunities existed. Furthermore, Martha described herself as average in her sport so she had not entertained the idea of using athletics as a career vehicle. Martha's plans after high school graduation changed when she learned from a friend that the opportunity existed to pair athletics with education in the United States. Martha described how she first learned of the opportunity:

When I was in my senior year (of high school), I had one my girlfriends, she had a boyfriend who came over to the United States to one of the schools. And, so I asked "how did he go?" ...And, so I asked and they said he gets to (compete athletically) and if you have the talent they can give you a scholarship there...you can (compete) and stay there for some time and go to school.

After learning about the opportunity to attend a university in the United States while competing athletically, Martha believed she wanted to pursue it. She believed earning a scholarship would provide her the chance to receive an education she would not have access to in her native country. Additionally, the prospect of living in the United States was appealing for a variety of reasons. Martha explained that she viewed studying in the United States as an ideal environment (despite never visiting) and the opportunity to continue athletics as a "great achievement." Martha did not directly state she would have been unable to receive a college education in her native country, but she alluded to the financial difficulties and the importance of the scholarship often.

When Martha decided she wanted to pursue the opportunity to receive an education in the United States, she consulted with her father. During the time she was a senior in high school, Martha indicated she did not take competing in her sport seriously. Martha and her father created a plan for her to improve in her sport with the ultimate goal of receiving a scholarship to attend an institution in the United States. Martha described the planning stage with her father:

I was just an average person and my dad was like, “OK how about you really start training because I don’t think you have done enough? I think you can be so good and not average.” So, we decided that I was going to train at like a training camp in (her native country)...I had to move...to a training camp to do my training and see how everything goes. I went there and I trained...and it was really hard for me to train with (the other athletes).

While Martha was at the training camp, she participated in competitions that were designed to help attract interest from coaches at universities in the United States. During one of the competitions, Martha came in contact with a coach from her native country who is well-known for helping individuals receive scholarship offers in the United States. After coming in contact with the coach who helps athletes receive scholarships, Martha won a competition and she gained notoriety. As a result, a junior college in the United States offered her a scholarship. Martha explained her experience in her initial recruitment by the junior college:

I talked with their coach. I didn’t even have to clear with the NCAA if you are going to a junior college. I didn’t know the difference between Division 1 schools...I was like I just need to go. That’s all that I wanted to do at that time. So, I just finished up everything and my dad just was happy about it and helped me with it. I took the SAT. They sent me like the I-20.

After earning the scholarship to the junior college in the United States and gaining admittance, Martha had another step to make her a dream a reality. Martha needed to go to

her country's embassy to receive a visa to come to the United States. Without receiving a visa, Martha would not be able to leave her native country. Martha discussed traveling to the embassy:

I went to the Embassy, and I didn't get the visa because there are a lot of ways before you get here. The Embassy is trying to know "are you guys going to come back?" Maybe I didn't show that I wasn't going to go back home or something, so they denied me the visa. So, I went back home, and we tried to talk about it with my dad. He was like, "you can go back (to the training camp)."

After being denied a visa, Martha returned to the training camp in hopes of improving in her sport. Martha had graduated from high school, but would have to wait to attend an institution in the United States. Martha discussed returning to the camp and her plans:

I just had to be patient and go back to the camp and start training again, and try to see what I can do different to change the school or something like that. So, I went back to the camp, started my training...Coach (Brad), he was in (her native country)... And, that time when he came...I talked with him and he was like, "Ok, maybe you should clear with the NCAA and you can come to our school." I didn't even know what the NCAA was, so I had to consult some people. They helped me and they sent me a lot of commands.

Brad has had success recruiting other student-athletes from Martha's country. He provided insight into how he recruited Martha and others from her native country:

A lot of it is word of mouth. We've had success in the past with some people. So, one of the athletes may know somebody back home that is (competing) and going to be a good athlete...I've gone over there to watch some (competitions) and go to different high schools and different things to get to know people and just get the word out...we are fortunate because we have had success in the past, so there is a lineage there and it is known. So, that helps....it is like anything else because it difficult to verify anything over there...It's a third-world country. It's not something where you are going to get results readily.

After her conversation with Brad, Martha had a new opportunity to attend an institution in the United States. One component of being eligible by the NCAA is paying for

the clearinghouse to process the eligibility documents. For Martha, the required fee was concerning and her family had to raise money. Martha described what her family did to raise the money: *“It’s very expensive...clearing NCAA is like \$100...which is like the salary for my dad. So, it can...take all of his money...He had to do some fundraising and, we did it.”*

Despite meeting Brad and him expressing interest, Martha was being courted by other schools at the same time. She had shown great improvement in her sport and many institutions took notice. Martha ultimately chose to accept Brad’s scholarship offer because her coach in her native country was familiar with him. Martha explained her decision-making process:

I had like seven schools from the United States saying, “hey can you come to my school. We have this team. We have these things and our school is really great.”...I was in a big dilemma. I ended up being like, “Ok, I don’t know what to do again.” Because, it is a hard position when you have like many places to go. So, I didn’t know much about (the institution in this study)...(Martha’s coach in her native country) was like, “(the institution in this study) is a good school academically and (athletically) and you need to balance both of them. So, I would recommend you go there.” I was like, “OK.” I signed the whatever with (the institution in this study).

After signing the National Letter of Intent to attend the institution in this study, Martha still needed to receive a visa from her native country’s embassy. As was previously stated in this section, no guarantee existed that Martha would be granted a visa. Unlike her first visit to the embassy, Martha devised a plan to receive her visa. Martha explained her plan:

When I didn’t get the visa for the first time, I went home and went back to the camp to meet some people. So, I asked them, “What else can I do?” I was frustrated after being denied the visa because I was like, “I’ve got to get it. I’ve got to go to America.”...They were like, “...maybe you should go back and have now a reason because they will ask you like what did you do after being denied the visa. So, you should have something.”

Martha enrolled in a course to improve her computer skills. She believed that by gaining a certificate, it would help her case for why she needed to go to the United States before returning to her native country. When Martha went back to the embassy, she was asked if she would return to her native country after she completed her education in the United States. When Martha said she would return, she was granted a visa. After training, being recruited, fundraising, and trying to be granted a visa for one year after she graduated from high school, Martha was going to be able to attend an institution in the United States. She received her visa in early January and was on a plane to the United States on January 16.

Brad explained Martha is not unusual in having difficulty receiving a visa from her native country:

I think...the most difficult hurdle well for anybody is just getting through the Embassy....once they get over the initial hurdle of getting signed up with the clearing house, applying, all those things. Then, once they have their I-20, then they have got to take that to the Embassy and then you get a visa....It was hard when she went through, but I think it is getting harder and harder these days to get people through the Embassy...we sent three I-20s out in the summer and only one got through...I can't speak relative to anybody else, but I know (Martha's native country) right now it's very difficult to get through the Embassy...I see myself getting away from (recruiting international student-athletes) a little bit. I just think it is getting so hard, and it is a lot of work to get it all lined up and just get them here and then they can't get through the Embassy. I have one kid that I have tried three times, and it's just like he is not going to get out. I had a conversation with someone at the Embassy, and they just made the comment to me that not everybody deserves to come to the United States.

Martha had never been on a plane prior to boarding one to travel to the United States to attend the institution in this study. The experience of leaving her family, traveling to a new country, and riding a plane was difficult for Martha. She explained her emotions when leaving for the United States:

I cried a lot. I had trouble coming. I was really excited. I was like, "Oh, I just want to go there." ...after everything was ready, that was the moment that I was like, "Oh my gosh. It's time now to leave." ...I started asking my dad again... "How am I going to see you guys again?" ...I started crying and being like, "I don't want to go dad." ...I didn't want to come here again after I was so excited and all I wanted to do was leave.

It was my first time getting into a plane, which was not really fun... (In her native country) people think flying is a really big thing. People would be like, "Did you know this girl, (Martha), she just took a plane." ...I was looking down and I was like, "Oh my gosh, I think I am going to die or something." ...I had a very, bad, bad, feeling about it because it was my first time. So, I just went to my seat and started crying.

Martha flew to a European city before a flight took her to a large city in the United States. Martha's adjustment to the new culture began in the airport where she saw large groups of people who were white for the first time in her life. Martha described her initial experience in the United States:

I just saw many people walking around. I saw a lot of different things. We come from a place (where) we don't have a mixture of people...So, at the airport, I was just seeing like everybody is white...And I was just imagining like, "Oh my gosh, I am just in the middle of nowhere." I was not used to having different diversity. One time, I got to meet a white person I would shake their hand just to feel their hand.

Another new experience for Martha when she arrived in the United States was seeing snow. She arrived during the winter and there was snow on the ground. Martha mentioned she thought the snow was a decoration on the ground, and she had no conception of how cold the climate would be in her new home. Martha's coach (Brad) picked her up at the airport, and she was exposed to cold weather for the first time in her life:

I didn't want to talk. I was just like, cool and on my own. I was just thinking, "I wish I could get back home. Right now." So, I got here at like 12 at night. I went to my coach's house. I was there for a night...I went there and I was walking around and I was like, "Oh my gosh, I am freezing." ...I was like, "What is going on here?" ...Coach explained to me, "Oh, it is now winter time here." ...I didn't even know what he was talking about.

Martha stayed with a teammate her first night at the institution because she could not access her dormitory over the winter break. The first morning in the United States, Martha experienced an event that helps to summarize some of the adjustments she went through at the institution in this study:

I woke up in the morning, like 9, and everyone else was still sleeping. I was so hungry. So, I didn't want to be shy anymore because I was, like, dying. I went into the kitchen and just looked at the fridge and I was like, "Oh my gosh." ...everything is just different. I don't even know what's going on. I just looked at the fridge and I didn't even understand what these things were...in Africa...the houses are made of like sand, not even sand, but mud...they have mud on the floors and everything....I was like, "Oh, OK maybe this is a fridge." I thought it was a fridge, but I had no idea how to open it and what to do.

Martha's adjustment to her new surroundings and weather was eased by being a member of a supportive team. She explained the benefits of being on a team:

I think if I were just coming here to study, not (being a student-athlete) I guess it could be really hard because you can't get a good introduction like we did in (her sport)...these people work as a team...people try to make sure sometimes that you may look sad and they look at you someone will just approach you and be like, "Oh, is everything all right?" Your teammates will be there and they are so caring...Coming from (her native country) I didn't have enough clothes and it's winter here....When I got here they did a good job collecting some clothes from everyone. And then they just bring a lot of clothes to me...I didn't believe it because I had never seen anything like it before. And they were just like, "Whatever you want that fits you and if everything fits you just go with it." ...So, I feel like being part of the team is really good.

Martha relied heavily on her teammates and the benefits the institution could provide her as a scholarship athlete because she had the equivalent of \$23 to live on her entire first semester. As a result, Martha had trouble leaving campus her first semester other than team-related events. None of her coaches were allowed to provide her any extra benefits because of NCAA rules. Martha described her first semester as "really hard." She did leave campus

one time after teammates asked her to join them for dinner at a local restaurant. Martha explained she had no idea how much money the meal would cost, what a tip was, and her bill was more money than she had to live on the entire semester. Luckily, Martha's teammates were able to help her pay for the bill. Martha was confined to eating food from the on-campus eating locations. However, all the food offered at the on-campus eating locations was dramatically different than what she would eat in her home country. Because of the different foods she ate, Martha was sick for many days during her first semester which impacted her ability to compete and train. She had to rely on her teammates to provide her with certain foods as her body adjusted to what was offered at the cafeterias at the university. Martha also mentioned that her coaches helped her sign all the appropriate paperwork while her teammates assisted her with questions regarding academics and improving her English skills.

Martha also had difficulties because of her lack of English-speaking skills. She provided background on how the English language played a role in her time on campus:

In (her native country) they teach us in English like (it's the national language). So, that's the language people speak most....if you go to classroom we have these teachers who teach us in English a little bit. But most of the things we do are just in (her native language)... I had trouble (with English)...my first semester. My coach said I am going to live in the dormitory because I was living with someone from America. And so living with someone from (the United States) makes a big difference...You will struggle a little bit but at the end of the day you get to understand more English than living with my fellow (a native of her country). So, I just stayed with her in the dorms, and I had a lot of trouble. I had to explain to her when she asked me something because maybe I just missed some words. Trying to get the conversation together was hard. It took me awhile before I got it really well.

Despite not having the opportunity to travel to her native country or having family members who had access to computers, Martha found ways to communicate with her family.

She explained her tactics to stay in touch with her family members:

I wish we could do Skype, that is what is coming to my mind. The thing is we don't have computers. But I call my family a lot. We talk very much...That's the only thing I have to make me think I am at home. Because, I am so close to my dad. I talk with him, like three times a week. And, my siblings, we talk a lot.

When Martha participated in this study she was in her senior year at the institution in this study. Martha excelled both academically and athletically despite her initial difficulties during her time at the institution in this study. While participating in this study, Martha described her post-graduation plans:

I am still thinking about a lot of things, maybe a second major. After school, I want to see what I can do with my (Martha's sport) stuff. Because (competing in Martha's sport) is something I can do...And, if it happens, well I am just going to keep (competing) a little bit. Just not even looking for a job or anything else...I love (Martha's native country) so much, it's a really good country...I wish I could just be staying there, but I just think I should get everything right...And then I would be able to move back to (her native country) and stay there when I have everything...and I can buy a house for myself.

Martha shared details on many topics that were illustrated in this section. Her experience is now summarized into three parts to help the reader reflect back on her story. The three areas of summary are: opportunity, process, and adjustment.

Opportunity

Martha's decision to attend the institution in this study was largely based on the fact that earning an athletic scholarship afforded her the opportunity to complete higher education. Martha's family would likely not have been able to pay for higher education in

her native country. Martha did not consider herself an elite athlete before learning that she could earn an athletic scholarship to serve as a vehicle to more education. When she learned of the opportunity in the United States Martha began to train more vigorously than she ever had in her life. Secondary to Martha's reasoning for pursuing an education in the United States were the ability to enhance her English skills and exposure to living in a new country.

Process

From the time Martha decided she wanted to attend an institution in the United States to when she actually stepped on campus was over year, involved two different institutions, and required multiple visits to her country's Embassy. Martha looked to improve in her sport to earn a scholarship by practicing at a training camp. She was first noticed by a junior college that offered her a scholarship, which she accepted despite not knowing much about a junior college. However, Martha did not receive a visa from the Embassy, so she was unable to leave her native country. She returned to her training camp and was eventually recruited by her current coach and eventually accepted his scholarship offer. Martha was more experienced in how to try to be granted a visa and she was able to earn it the second time. Another hurdle to overcome was Martha's family was not being able to pay for the NCAA clearinghouse fee, so fundraising had to occur. After the NCAA fee was paid and she earned her visa, Martha was able to attend the institution in this study.

Adjustment

Martha's adjustment period to the institution in this study started when she first flew on a plane to the United States. Martha had never been on a plane, which created multiple stresses. She then was exposed to people of different races and that caused its own feeling of

uneasiness. When Martha arrived at the institution in this study she was immediately faced with cold weather and snow as well as financial concerns. Further adding to her initial difficulties was she had little access to food other than what was offered in the cafeterias. The food in the cafeterias was different than what she was used to eating at home, which caused her body to be negatively impacted. Teammates and coaches proved to be vitally important to Martha during her initial adjustment to her new surroundings by providing her with clothing, English assistance, and a family atmosphere.

Stacey

Stacey was raised in an Asian country and plays a sport that is highly individualistic in nature. Throughout her participation in this study, it was apparent Stacey was raised in a high socioeconomic environment. First, Stacey's sport requires significant funding to achieve success based on the high expense of equipment, coaching, travel, and access to facilities to practice and compete. Second, Stacey had her own car at the institution in this study despite having her home in an Asian country. In addition, Stacey attended an international school and had been to the United States multiple times with her family prior to attending the institution in this study. The fact that Stacey grew up in a high socioeconomic environment is an important aspect to consider when understanding why she wanted to come to the United States, her initial experiences, and her plans after graduation.

When she was 14-years-old Stacey was being coached by an individual from Australia who asked her family how good she would like to become. Stacey's father responded that the goal was for her to play in college. As a result, Stacey's coach from Australia told the family he would recommend her working with a different coach who had

more experience with higher-level athletes and helping them earn the opportunity to compete in college. After changing coaches, Stacey's goal became to train and compete in an effort to play her sport in college. Stacey explained her thinking while in high school:

I (knew) that if I want to be good I have to come to the United States because back home, people who are really good either go pro or they don't really play (her sport) and study at the same time. That's not what I was learning towards. I wanted education and get (her sport) going also, so I felt like this was the only way to go.

Stacey commented that many athletes in her sport come to the United States to play collegiately, so the opportunity was something she had been exposed to for many years. The opportunity to play her sport for a college in her native country existed, but Stacey believed the level of competition and availability of resources was not as high as she could have access to in the United States. Stacey also explained that institutions in her native country that offered the opportunity to compete athletically were not highly regarded academically, so coming to the United States was her preferred option. Stacey said there are four strong academic schools in her native country and if one attended a different school, the perception is that individual is not intelligent. The four schools of interest did not offer athletics, so Stacey looked internationally for different options. She described attending an institution in the United States while playing her sport as "the best of both worlds." Stacey said her decision to come to the United States was purely to continue playing her sport. Stacey's coach was her guide in helping her market herself and play at a high enough level to gain interest from coaches in the United States to receive a scholarship offer. Her coach had mentored other athletes in her sport that received scholarship offers from schools in the United States. Stacey followed her coach's advice on competitions to play in and how to become marketable to coaches in the United States who could offer her a scholarship.

Regarding which institution in the United States to attend, Stacey conducted research online to see what schools offered her major. She had learned of the institution in this study during high school because her English teacher knew of it, and spoke glowingly about the school because he had friends that had attended. Stacey had another high school teacher who was from the city that the institution in this study is located in, and also spoke highly of the institution to her. Despite knowing about the institution in this study, Stacey still needed to be recruited by its coach. Stacey explained her recruitment:

I usually came (to the United States) to play in the summer once school's out in July or August and stay with my cousins in (the United States) with my dad being with me. People would come (to competitions) and recruit and they come talk to you, but I was already committed to the other school...So, I was verbally committed to (the other school) since day one. So, I turned down all the colleges that had contacted me, including (her current institution)...I think at one of the tournaments (her current coach - Mary) was watching (someone else). So, then (Mary) got to talking with my dad about me...my senior year in high school is when everything kind of went downhill with (the original school she committed to). I was trying to graduate early... I was going to graduate in December, and I thought I would have six or seven months of just (practicing her sport) and getting my SAT scores...I took the SAT and my score was not high enough for (the original school she committed to) and that was my first time. So, I tried again and my second time, still not high enough. By the third time, I think they kind of lost faith in me. They were like, "I don't think you're going make it"... my dad sent out e-mails to other coaches that have contacted him before. I was really lucky because (Mary) was the first one who replied and my dad was like, "Yeah, I liked her a lot."...My mom was really worried from what happened with (Stacey's original college). It's not like it was that tragic or anything but it was how they give up on me so easily. She was like, "I think we need to look more closely about who we send our daughter to or where she's going to be, who she is going to be with for the rest of her (sport she plays) career." My mom was like, "So, what do you think of this coach?" She was more concerned about the coaches now because my mom, usually she doesn't associate herself with my (the sport Stacey plays) that much.

After sending out e-mails to coaches, Stacey's father began to research the institutions that contacted him. He narrowed the possible choices to two for Stacey, and she

ultimately chose the institution in this study because her father trusted the coach (Mary) and because Stacey knew another member of the team who was from her native country. A month after deciding she wanted to attend the institution in this study, Stacey was required to be on campus to start classes. Because she had been committed to a different institution for over two years, Stacey already had her transcripts approved by the NCAA. Despite not earning a high enough SAT score to be admitted to her first institution, the university in this study accepted Stacey because it does not require as high of an SAT score.

Prior to coming to the institution in this study Stacey was confident in her English skills. She had experience with English by attending an international school that had teachers from the United States and where it was taught in every grade. English is the secondary language in Stacey's native city as well. Furthermore, Stacey had relatives that lived in the United States who she visited throughout her childhood. As a result, Stacey was exposed to the United States and the English-speaking culture. When Stacey started at the institution in this study, she lost some of her confidence in her English skills, specifically with her reading proficiency:

I felt like I could communicate, but my reading used to be terrible. I read super slow but in terms of talking I feel like I can communicate really well. I can tell people what I was thinking and communicate my feelings in general. I think people could understand me really well, even though my vocabulary is not very big...I was a little scared because my reading was really bad...Other than that, I was OK. I think I can communicate fine, not perfect.

Stacey has experienced improvement regarding her English skills since she started at the institution in this study:

I think it has improved; reading and writing improved so much just because I have to write a lot of papers and read a lot of books. But, communicating also improved too especially when you are a student-athlete you are forced to talk to a lot of people and communicate your thoughts and ideas to them. I think it

really helped to do interviews and just a lot of that stuff helped kind of embrace my English skills.

Multiple times during the data-collection process with Stacey she commented on how valuable it was for her experience at the institution in this study that her coach embraced international student-athletes. Stacey's team had multiple international student-athletes and her coach was intentional in helping them adjust to the new environment. When talking about her team and coach, Stacey often became emotional because of how important they were to her. Stacey explained the value of her team and coaches in helping her adjust in the United States:

It definitely helped a lot. I cannot imagine myself coming here without playing (her sport) and without having my teammates....with the team, we are supposed to speak English. So, coach has a rule that we need to speak English at all times. I found that really weird in the beginning, and I was kind of shy doing that...you get used to it pretty quickly, and it's better that way because everybody understands what you are saying. It really improves your skill....I think having a sense of belonging really helps too...When you come here, you have to start everything from zero. It's really hard...it gets pretty lonely and kind of depressing sometimes but with having my teammates, it's like having another family. I would have to say (her coach) has done a really good job, again, of keeping the team the way they are...Being a part of the team, a small team especially, is really nice because you get to know all your teammates fast and well. So, all of a sudden it's like you have (a few) sisters. Sometimes you hate them and you love them...you know they will always be there for you.

When asked, Stacey said she would not have changed anything about her experience at the institution in this study. She mentioned her freshman year that she joined an ethnic club on campus that she enjoyed. However, she believed the club required too much time and was taking away from her opportunity to practice her sport so Stacey left the club. Stacey credits her coach (Mary) for playing an immense role in her positive experience at the institution in this study. Stacey referred to Mary as a second mother and someone who cares

deeply about the players on the team. Mary embraced the different cultural backgrounds of the student-athletes on the team, listened to the student-athletes, and worked hard to create a unique team culture. Mary checked in on the players often, asking how they were doing academically and other non-athletics-related components of their lives, which Stacey described as being extremely valuable. Stacey had friends who were international student-athletes on other teams at the institution in this study, and they did not have the same relationships with their coaches and teammates. Stacey also believed that having a female coach was beneficial for her because she felt more comfortable sharing certain components of her life that she otherwise would not disclose to a male coach.

Despite her teammates and coaches serving as a secondary family for Stacey at the institution in this study, they could not fully replace her true family. Stacey said the most difficult adjustment for her in the United States was being away from her family and the many ways they helped her. Being away from her family exposed Stacey to living on her own and the life adjustments that required:

The biggest thing would be being away from my family. Because I was the youngest, so everybody used to take care of me. I've never washed my own clothes before in my life (laughs). I had to do my own laundry and everything...I always had my family back home to be like, "Mom, I'm not really feeling good today; I think I am going to do something fun." Here, it is like you are so busy...Sometimes you get back and you are like, "Oh my gosh, I wish I could just go to bed." But I have to do laundry....I have to be more disciplined, like grown up.

Prior to traveling to the United States, Stacey conducted research online about the state to which she was moving to prepare herself. Stacey said people in her native country told her their thoughts about her soon-to-be home state and little of it was favorable. Stacey's research debunked some of her preconceived thoughts and also informed her about

certain changes she would experience such as weather in her new surroundings. Stacey particularly mentioned the weather has not been as dramatic a change as she anticipated and the other areas she was concerned about have proven to be of little consequence. Stacey learned about college football in the United States and the pageantry associated with it prior to coming, and she was looking forward to the experience. Her first college game lived up to her expectations. *“I thought (going to a college football game) was awesome. I thought it was the coolest thing ever,”* said Stacey. Stacey credited her experiences growing up and the open-minded nature her parents had on different cultures with helping her quickly adjust to living in the United States as well.

When she completes her degree and athletics eligibility at the institution in this study, Stacey was unsure of her plans when she participated in this study as a junior. Stacey had not given her plans much thought and had a number of different options in her mind. Stacey explained her thoughts:

I actually have been thinking about that just because I am going to be a senior but my previous three years I haven't really given it much thought. Before, I was 155 percent sure I was going to go pro....Right now, I am still thinking.... that is going to be my ultimate goal to play in the (professional league in the United States) but the reason is just because that's the best (competition)....now that I think about it, it doesn't have to be like that...what I've learned in the team and here from classes and stuff has taught me so much about life, and I feel like you don't need to go just one way to be successful and that being successful is subjective.

If she did not play her sport professionally, Stacey was looking to somehow combine her two passions – sports and art. She commented that working in animation for a sports video game franchise or Disney would be a career path of interest. However, Stacey acknowledged she did not have the experience to attain a position in that profession right out of college, so she was also considering moving to a different country to gain experience and

to travel. Stacey also believed playing her sport professionally in countries other than the United States could afford her the opportunity to improve and ultimately qualify to play in the United States.

To conclude the section on Stacey is a summary of her experiences regarding the institution in this study. The summary is divided into three areas: *opportunity*, *process*, and *adjustment* to aid the reader in differentiating the multiple facets of Stacey's experiences.

Opportunity

Stacey had considered coming to the United States since she was 14 years old, and the conversation was primarily driven by her coach in her native country and her father. She knew of other athletes in her sport from her native country who had come to the United States to play collegiately as well. Stacey thought the marriage of receiving an education and playing her sport "was the best of both worlds" and United States' model was ideal. In her native country, Stacey commented that there are only four prestigious academic institutions and they do not offer athletics. Attending a different institution would have a negative effect on how people perceived her level of intelligence, so since she wanted to play her sport Stacey needed to look for options outside of her native country. The primary reason to come to the United States was to continue to play her sport in an effort to improve enough to play professionally.

Process

Stacey and her family relied heavily on her personal coach in her native country during high school. Stacey's coach had worked with other athletes to help them earn scholarships in the United States and navigate the eligibility process with the NCAA and

gaining admittance to an institution. Stacey originally accepted a scholarship offer from a different institution in the United States. When Stacey was not able to produce a high enough SAT score to gain admittance to the original institution, the coaches indicated she should start looking at other universities. Stacey's father played a more pronounced role in looking for a second school and e-mailed coaches who had recruited her originally. After receiving contact from coaches, Stacey's father provided her with two options. Stacey knew about the institution in this study because a childhood friend attended it, and she had teachers in her high school who spoke highly of it. Stacey's father had also met the head coach (Mary) at the institution at this study during a competition where she was recruiting potential student-athletes. Stacey's father was impressed with Mary during their initial meeting and their e-mail correspondence. Stacey did not experience any difficulty in gaining admittance to the institution in this study or earning eligibility from the NCAA.

Adjustment

Because she had traveled to the United States to visit relatives, attended an international high school and done research about the state she was moving to beforehand, Stacey had a relatively smooth transition to living in the United States. She also credited her family with raising her to have an open mind about different cultures and adapting. When she arrived at the institution in this study, Stacey's teammates and coaches were instrumental in helping her succeed and adjust. Stacey strongly believed that the caring nature of her coach (Mary) created a family atmosphere on the team. Such a closely-knit team helped Stacey tremendously. Stacey experienced some difficulty regarding her English skills, specifically with reading. The area that caused the most discomfort for Stacey when she

started at the institution in this study was being so far from her family. Stacey mentioned how close she was to her family and the distance was troubling. However, being a member of a team helped in filling the void she experienced by being thousands of miles away from her family. Stacey could not imagine succeeding in the United States without the care and built-in network her teammates and coaches provided.

Thomas

Thomas is from an African country and participated in this study prior to his junior year. Thomas competes in the same sport as Martha which is highly individualistic. Thomas' sport requires little financial commitment to excel in because athletes can practice alone. Furthermore, Thomas's sport is the most popular sport in his native country. During the data collection of this study, it was not apparent if Thomas grew up in a low-socioeconomic background. However, Thomas alluded not having many opportunities after graduating from high school because of limited jobs in his native country and his family not being willing to pay for him to attend a university. Thomas also mentioned his family does not have the money to support him flying back to his native country, so he has not seen them since he came to the United States. Considering Thomas's background and sport, particularly the lack of professional and educational opportunities in his native country, will help explain his experiences, which are discussed in this section.

Thomas was highly regarded in his sport during high school. He was known as one of the top performers in his sport in his native country. As a result of his early success, Thomas practiced with other high-level athletes in the capital city in his native country. While at the training camp, Thomas practiced with one of the world's top competitors in his

sport. Thomas referred to the world-class athlete as his “mentor” and learned more about his sport and the opportunities associated with being a highly regarded athlete through this individual. While practicing with the world-class athletes, Thomas was approached by a coach at the institution in this study. Thomas explained his first encounter with a coach from the United States and it being the first time he had considered attending a university away from home:

I was doing some workouts and there was this coach from (his current institution) and he said, “I think I am interested in this guy.” Then he was like, “Did you finish high school” because in (his home country) it is kind of different, so it’s not uncommon to ask if you graduated high school or not. I told him, “Yeah, I finished high school” but then you have to sit for national exam and then wait for like three or four months...it was on January my exam. (The coach) was like, “If you get a C plus on the exam then you might get a scholarship this year.”

Thomas was intrigued by the conversation he had from the coach from the institution in this study. Thomas mentioned during the interview for this study that he understood the coach represented a university in the United States during their initial meeting. However, Thomas did not know understand the concept of a scholarship. After his conversation with the coach from the institution in this study, Thomas went home and asked his father about scholarships. Thomas’s parents were aware of what a scholarship was and explained it to him. After talking with his parents that evening, Thomas decided he was interested in pursuing the opportunity to attend an institution in the United States on an athletics scholarship. Thomas said he did not care which institution or where it was located, simply a school in the United States. He explained in detail why he wanted to come to the United States:

The only thing you want in (his native country) is just to go to the United States. It doesn’t matter if it is in (names a state) or (names another state).

You need to go to the States, that's it to get an education...My goal was to come here, get an education, and go back...in (his native country), going to a college is kind of expensive. You are going to get an education and not going to pay. So, my dad was like, "If I am not going to pay, then let him go."

In Thomas's native country English is taught throughout compulsory school, so he was exposed to it. However, Thomas said on a scale from 1 to 10, he had a confidence level of 5 in his English skills prior to coming to the United States. In addition to attending an institution in the United States to earn an education, Thomas wanted the opportunity to enhance his English skills while he lived in a different country. Thomas did not specifically mention that competing or extending his athletics career was part of why he was interested in coming to the United States. The primary reason for Thomas coming to the United States was to receive a free education and being an excellent athlete was the vehicle for him to accomplish that goal.

Thomas was recruited by two institutions in the United States and he explained he did not know the difference between the two of them and had limited access to information on either. What Thomas did have was a mentor who attended the institution in this study who provided first-hand knowledge about the university. As a result, Thomas chose the institution in this study despite knowing little about it outside of what his mentor told him.

Thomas explained his decision-making process:

(My mentor) assisted me a lot. I didn't know anything about (his current institution). I wasn't even using internet or Google or something like that. I was like, "OK, I am going to (his current institution) but I don't know what is (the state his current school is in). I'm just going to school." I mean, it's not like it was a guarantee that I was going to the United States.

Thomas did not have any idea what steps he needed to take in order to earn admittance to the institution in this study. Furthermore, there are a multitude of differences

between the education systems in the United States and his native country that caused problems for Thomas. Additionally, Thomas did not have identification at this stage of his life which created issues:

I didn't know the processes. I had to take the SAT. The problem is, in (his home country), you have to have an ID to take the SAT examination. I had this for the May exam and I went to the exam room. They told me, "You need an ID." But, back then in (his home country), you don't get an ID until you are 18 and I was 17. I get into the exam room and I was like, "I don't have an ID and I am under 17." They were like, "No, the requirements say you have to produce your ID" so my exam was canceled. I didn't do it. So, I had to go back again. I had to look for a passport because I had a birth certificate, so I had to use my certificate to get a passport.

After finally taking the SAT, Thomas had to provide his transcripts to the NCAA. Thomas said he was not talking to the head coach at the institution in this study during this time period because he believed it was against NCAA rules. As a result, he relied heavily on his mentor who had competed at the institution in this study many years prior who is from Thomas's native country. Thomas successfully submitted his transcripts to the institution in this study as well as to the NCAA and earned admittance from both. Thomas credited his mentor with helping him tremendously. His next step was going to his country's embassy to apply for a visa, and this was a concerning part of the process:

You have to go to the Embassy again and do some interviews. A lot of people are going to interview, but they are not going to get a visa...so I was like I am just going to do my best...it's kind of frightening just to go in. You have to make an appointment first with a lot of money. Then, you have to pay a service fee again. That's almost (\$200 US dollars) again and then what's the next step? ...it's like a 10-minute interview...they were asking like what was my best score in math. How did I select (his current institution)....Two days before I went to the embassy I had to Google (his current institution) just to research it for my appointment. I was coming here for bio chem as my major. I was good in biology and chemistry...they told me, "How did you choose (his current institution?) I was like, "OK, I chose (his current institution) because it is a school in agriculture...They were like, "OK." This was on a Tuesday

and they said they would get me the visa on Thursday. I was supposed to report (to his current institution) on Saturday. I had three days.

Thomas had three days to prepare to leave his family and travel to the United States despite having never visited and knowing little about it. Furthermore, Thomas knew very little about the state he would be living in other than what his mentor had told him. If Thomas was unable to make it to the institution in this study for classes by the following Monday, he would not have been awarded the scholarship and would have had to restart the recruiting process the following summer. When Thomas returned home after receiving his visa, he commented that his family didn't even know what a visa was and questioned the legitimacy of what he brought home. He eventually explained to them what the visa was and he needed to buy a plane ticket in the coming days. Two days later Thomas bought a plane ticket and flew to the United States. Thomas's first day at the institution he was faced with a unique cultural moment because he started classes the day after the Super Bowl:

I came (to his current institution) on a Sunday and on Monday I was going to class. I was so confused; like the first person I saw when I got here asked, "Did you watch the Super Bowl?" I went to my advisor. My advisor was like, "Did you watch the Super Bowl last night?" I was like, "What is the Super Bowl anyway?" He asked if I like football and I was like, "What is football?"

In addition to the popular culture differences, like the Super Bowl, Thomas was immediately faced with a dramatic change in weather from what he was accustomed to in his native country. Thomas described how the weather differences impacted him:

It was freezing. I came in the spring and everything was new and the land was white. I landed in (a different city) and the first thing I asked coach was, "I think I am in the wrong place. I think I want to go back. Can you get me a phone to call my dad?" I told my dad I want to come back and I hate this place. I was like, 'What am I going to do? I'm not staying here.' My first day of training, I think it was a Wednesday and I was supposed to train outside. I didn't have clothes. I didn't have enough warm clothes. I got

some clothes from (another international student-athlete on his team). So, he gave me his clothes, some extra clothes. I (was outside) for 30 minutes and my gosh when I got back my hands were frozen and in the next five minutes I was crying. I was like, “No, I hate this, my hands are cold.” I came to coach and I was like, “You know what coach, I want to get out of here.”

Thomas mentioned all he had in his possession when he traveled to the United States were three outfits but no coat or jacket. His coach calmed him by explaining to Thomas that the team and his teammates have extra clothing to provide him. The access to more and warmer clothing made a positive impression on Thomas, and he decided he was going to have a more open mind regarding whether he was going to persist at the institution in this study. In addition to helping provide him with initial warm clothing, being a member of a team at the institution had numerous positive impacts on Thomas. Specifically, Thomas discussed how the sport he competed in has different rules and training methods in the United States than in his native country. As a result, Thomas was very confused by the differences and felt alienated from the sport and the whole experience. One of Thomas's teammates made a point to talk with Thomas during practices despite Thomas not wanting to talk because of his lack of confidence in his English skills. Eventually, Thomas responded to his teammate and began to open up and feel more comfortable in his new surroundings. His teammate helped explain the differences and training methods in the United States, which resulted in Thomas enjoying his time and also marked improvement athletically. It took two months after arriving for Thomas to speak to any of his other teammates because of the lack of confidence he had in his English-speaking skills. Thomas credited his teammate who made an effort to build a relationship with him as to why he stayed at the institution in this study.

In the classroom, Thomas experienced differences as well. The measuring system used in Thomas's native country differs from the English system used in the United States. Since Thomas majored in chemistry, the different measuring systems had a negative impact on Thomas:

I came here for chemistry because I liked my high school chemistry...In (his native country), we usually say (uses chemistry terms) in chemistry but when I get (to his current institution), they wanted to do something and I was like, "What is going on here?" I did my exam and I used (his native country) system, but they marked me wrong. I had to go to my advisor and ask her, "What is going on here?" She told me, "Where are you from?" I told her, "I am from (his native country)." "What kind of system are you guys using?" I told her, British, and she said, "I think you are right." I had a 78, and I think I was supposed to get 90 or 92 or something just because I messed up with configuration.

A second area Thomas had to adjust to academically at the institution in this study was the way students were tested, *"Here, (testing) is multiple choice. But, in (his native country) in my high school, it's an essay exam. You might get partial credit. But, here, if you miss it you are done. I was like, "uh oh. I don't like this kind of examination."*

After his initial struggles with the different systems and types of testing, Thomas met with his coach at the institution in this study to discuss tactics to help him improve academically. Thomas's coach recommended he sit in the front of the class and also meet with his professors when they had office hours available or briefly after each lecture. Thomas followed his coach's advice and began to see dramatic improvement academically. Thomas joked that he got to know his professors well by how often they met and he also was 10 minutes late to classes occasionally because he was staying after other ones to meet with the professors. Another tactic Thomas utilized was to ask his professors for the schedule one week ahead so he could read the material beforehand. By reading ahead and meeting with

his professors on a regular basis, Thomas excelled academically, and he also was performing well athletically.

As was previously stated, Thomas was a junior when he participated in this study. At the time, Thomas's plans had not changed regarding post-graduation. Thomas's plans were to return to his native country and pursue a career in the sport in which he competes.

The section on Thomas ends with a summarization to help the reader remember and reflect on his experiences. Like all sections on the participants in this study, three sub-sections (*opportunity*, *process*, and *adjustment*) are utilized to help the summary of Thomas's experience regarding the institution in this study.

Opportunity

Thomas wanted to attend the institution in this study because it was a school in the United States that he could attend on a scholarship. The opportunity to receive a free education was the highest priority to Thomas and his family. While athletics are important to him, Thomas could have continued his athletics career in his native country, but he knew athletics would be the way for him to earn a scholarship to come to the United States. A secondary reason Thomas was interested in coming to the United States was to improve his English skills. Thomas had taken English classes throughout his pre-college education in his native country, but he was not confident in his skills. He wanted to enhance his skills by coming to the United States.

Process

The process for Thomas to come to the United States came when a coach at the institution in this study approached him while he was training in the capital city in his native

country. The coach discussed a scholarship with Thomas but Thomas did not understand the concept of one. After learning what a scholarship was, Thomas was much more interested in coming to the United States. Thomas did not have access to the internet, so he turned to someone he considered a mentor who had attended the institution in this study years prior. Thomas's mentor helped him sign up for the SAT examinations, send in his transcripts properly, and set an appointment to receive a visa at his country's embassy. Despite hearing of others who struggled to receive a visa in his native country, Thomas was not rejected for one. After receiving his visa, Thomas had three days to buy a plane ticket and journey to the United States. He had to be enrolled in classes the following Monday which created stress in Thomas's life. Regardless, Thomas journeyed to the institution in this study and arrived on a Sunday, the day before he needed to begin classes.

Adjustment

Thomas experienced areas of adjustment immediately when he arrived at the institution in this study. The cold weather caused Thomas to initially consider leaving the university and transferring somewhere else despite not having any other options. Thomas's coach and teammates provided him support in the form of helping with warm clothing and as people for Thomas to talk to during this difficult time. Thomas also struggled academically; one reason was because the measuring system in the United States differed from what he utilized in his native country. Thomas and his coach at the institution in this study discussed tactics to utilize to improve his academic work, which resulted in dramatic improvement for Thomas. In the competition arena Thomas also struggled. He credited a teammate with helping Thomas adjust by explaining the different training methods used in the United States

and also providing support to Thomas. Eventually, Thomas began to improve and have the success in the United States that he had become accustomed to in his native country as a highly regarded high school athlete.

Summary

The findings of this study were presented in this chapter. The experiences of each of the seven participants were presented in a narrative form to aid the reader in understanding each individual in this study. Each section provided biographical background information on the participant before flowing into a chronological story of their experiences with the institution in this study. Every section concluded with a summary of the participant's experiences. To help categorize the section, a summary of the how the participant learned of the opportunity and why it interested him or her was included in the *opportunity* summary. The second category of summarization was *process* and it detailed the recruitment, eligibility admission, and how the participant was able to navigate any political hurdles in order to enroll at the institution in this study and compete in NCAA athletics. The third category included in the summary of each participant was *adjustment*, and it included what the participant experienced after he or she arrived at the institution in this study and what helped or inhibited their acculturation processes.

This study concludes with a Discussion in Chapter 5. The chapter includes a summary, findings, implications, recommendations for future research and final thoughts.

CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION

The final section of this study provides an overview of findings, implications, recommendations for future research, and my personal thoughts as the researcher who conducted the analysis.

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this study was to present the experiences of international student-athletes in NCAA Division I athletics. Despite the continued increase of international student-athletes in the United States, little research existed about the topic (Weston, 2006). Previous research has relied heavily on quantitative research methods. While quantitative research methods have merit, the results have generated scant data about the individuals who have had first-hand knowledge of the topic—the international student-athletes, themselves. Due to the lack of data collected and presented from qualitative research methods, I sought to present information about the topic from a fresh lens. Findings of this study may be useful to coaches, administrators, potential international student-athletes, and any individuals who have an interest in this topic and want a different perspective than what has been offered in previous research.

The literature review of this study provided background information about the recent influx of international student-athletes in NCAA Division I athletics and reasons coaches and universities are becoming increasingly interested in recruiting this population. Although information existed as to why the international student-athletes, themselves, were interested in attending a university in the United States, data were limited. The literature review provided historical background regarding international student-athletes coming to the United

States, and the role the NCAA has played in the eligibility process that has impacted international student-athletes' ability to enroll at an institution in the United States and compete in athletics. Green's (2005) model, which addresses the three purposes of all sports organizations: (a) recruitment, (b) retention, and (c) advancement, was utilized to create the conceptual framework that guided the literature review. The model was altered slightly in this study to have all three purposes of a sports organization as constantly interacting instead of being a purely linear set of occurrences.

A qualitative research design was utilized in this study to provide insights into the experiences of international student-athletes by positioning those individuals (the participants) at the center of the research. Case study methodology was used because all of the participants attended the same university. The university served as the "case" because every institution has its own unique components (i.e., location, size, majors, weather, etc.) that could impact the study; therefore, the decision was made to study athletes at one institution to create uniformity. Recurring results provided data regarding: (a) how the participants learned about the opportunity to attend a university in the United States; (b) why the opportunity appealed to them; (c) their recruitments; (d) hurdles they had to overcome to gain admittance and eligibility, (e) the adjustment period they encountered when they arrived in the United States; and (f) the evolution of their post-graduation plans. The voices of the international student-athletes in this study provided data based on their quotations from the interviews. The use of quotations from participants has not been a data source applied with any regularity in previous research about international student-athletes; therefore, this study presented new types of findings.

Seven international student-athletes who attended the university agreed to participate in this study. Five of the participants were women and two were men. The continents they represented were: North America, Africa, Asia, South America, and Europe. All of the participants were non-native-English speakers. Among the group of participants, there was representation from four different sports. The two men competed in sports that had female representation as well, so one could argue six sports were represented. The participants were selected in an effort to provide diversity in sport, gender, and continent of origin. A realistic component of the selection of the participants was availability because there was not a large population of non-native-English-speaking international student-athletes on the campus. Additionally, gaining access to student-athletes can often be a difficult proposition because these individuals are guided by coaches and athletics department personnel to grant interview requests. The participants took part in an initial interview that lasted approximately one hour. After transcription of the interview was completed, each participant was asked to review and provide feedback on the findings as a part of a member check. To help triangulate and better understand the experiences of the participants, their coaches at the institution were also invited to participate. Four coaches elected to participate, and their comments are included in the section about their participant when appropriate.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim by the researcher. Because many of the participants had heavy accents and sports-related-jargon was common, a decision was made to not outsource the transcription. An outsourced transcriber would likely have had difficulty with accuracy, whereas the researcher would be able to recall the intricacies of the interview. When transcription of each interview was completed, every line was coded with a written key word or phrase that summarized the main topic of the line. After initial coding of the

transcriptions, it became apparent there were three overarching themes from each participant: *opportunity*, *process*, and *adjustment*. *Opportunity* related to why the individual was interested in coming to the United States to pursue an education and compete in intercollegiate athletics. *Process* indicated the many steps and hurdles the participant had to complete during the recruitment, eligibility, admittance, transportation, and/or government documentation in order to attend the institution and compete in intercollegiate athletics. *Adjustment* pertained to what the participant experienced when he or she arrived at the institution, and what helped or hindered the ability to feel comfortable and succeed academically and athletically. The transcriptions were colored with highlighters in areas where the participants discussed information related to opportunity (pink), process (yellow), or adjustment (blue). These three categories (opportunity, process, and adjustment) served as a summarization tool for each participant's experience that was provided in detail in the preceding chapter.

The results (Chapter 4) were written in a narrative form, starting with each participant's story and serving as its own section. The narrative form was used intentionally to assist the reader in following and understanding the lived experiences of each participant. Each participant's story was presented in a relatively chronological format, starting with when he or she first learned of the opportunity to attend an institution in the United States on an athletics scholarship. Each participant's story concluded with post-graduation plans and how he or she had or had not changed them. As previously stated, each participant's experience was summarized into three areas—*opportunity*, *process*, and *adjustment*.

This chapter is the concluding chapter of this dissertation research. It provides an overview of the study and includes the research questions that were initially presented in

Chapter 1 within the framework of previous literature about the topic. Future research thoughts on the topic of international student-athletes and implications for practice are also presented. The chapter concludes with the author's final thoughts about the topic as a researcher.

Findings

The following overarching research question guided this study: *What are the experiences of non-native-English-speaking international student-athletes at a Division I institution?* The research question was devised to not be generalizable to all international student-athletes but, rather, to serve as a guide to present the experiences of the participants in this study. The experiences of the participants in this study may have similar components to other international student-athletes, while other parts may be unique to their personal story. The following sub-questions helped guide the study in an effort to answer the main research question. In addition, an important component that was presented during the data collection and findings is the impact of the participant's socioeconomic background in all facets of this study. Whether it was why they were interested in coming to the United States, how seriously they took the opportunity, or how they adjusted once arriving, it became apparent that socioeconomic status played a role. This is an important component to consider when reading the responses to the research questions.

Research Question 1: What are the reasons the participants wanted to attend their current institutions?

This question addressed why the participants were interested in attending the institution in this study. This question is important because seemingly numerous reasons exist as to why an individual would want to attend an institution, and this study illustrated

that the participants gave a wide variety of reasons for attending. It is important to understand the reasons the participants in this study provided are likely to mirror those of other international student-athletes, but their reasons do not speak for the entire population. The common areas discussed in this study were related to access to continuing to play sports and receiving a higher education degree.

A common theme among the participants in this study was that, by coming to the United States on an athletics scholarship, they had an opportunity to continue competing in their sports of choice. For many of the participants, no sanctioned opportunities existed in their sports in their native countries after high school at the level they desired, especially if they did not believe they were ready to be a professional athlete. The NCAA model provided many of the participants the appropriate level of competition, access to facilities, and the coaching they desired. Some of the participants did have the goal of pursuing a career in professional athletics, and the opportunities afforded in the NCAA model was a desirable option to enable them to improve and explore playing professionally in the future. The importance of competing in athletics is basically the reason members of this group come to the United States, and this sentiment mirrors findings in previous research (Bale, 1987, 1991; Jones et al., 2009).

Another recurring reason the participants in this study were interested in attending the institution was to receive an education in the United States while receiving a scholarship. In some instances, the participant's family could not afford to pay for their college education; thus, an athletics scholarship was paramount to whether they pursued higher education. Without a scholarship, it can be assumed the participants would have gone to other institutions that offered them a scholarship or not pursued the opportunity to participate in

intercollegiate athletics in the United States. All of the participants in this study received a scholarship that covered their tuition and room and board. Not every participant specifically referenced the need for a scholarship, but it was implied during the data collection. The importance of a scholarship has also been revealed to be vital in previous research (Bale, 1991; Popp, et al., 2011). In other cases, the education in the United States was perceived to be better than what the participant could attain in his or her native country. Other reasons regarding education illustrated by the participants in this study were the combination of living on one's own and enhancing his or her English-speaking skills. These skills, combined with a degree from a university in the United States, were highly desired when the individual returned to their native countries. The idea of coming to the United States for personal growth was mentioned in other studies about the topic (Kontaxakis, 2011).

While the specific reasons differed among the participants as to why they wanted to attend the institution and participate in athletics, one theme was apparent—the same opportunity did not exist in their native countries. The rarity of the NCAA model outside of the United States has been discussed in previous research (Abbey-Pinegar, 2010; Hosick, 2010; Rubingh & Broeke, 1998; Siedentop, 1995). Furthermore, the amount of resources and attention that are provided in intercollegiate athletics in the United States are unmatched in other countries in the non-professional sporting environment. The data gathered from the participants in this study affirmed this perception.

Research Question 2: What are the different hurdles non-native-English-speaking international student-athletes have to clear in order to be able to attend their current institutions?

This question addressed a vast topic in an effort to inform readers of the uniqueness of the challenges each international student-athlete faces when he or she wants to attend an

institution in the United States. While all the participants in this study indicated their personal challenges and ultimately enrolled, many more potential international student-athletes do not receive the opportunity to come the United States. Earning qualifying standardized test scores and attaining proper documentation for the few institutions offering admittance and scholarships were common themes that emerged during the study.

Each participant had his or her own unique set of challenges to be able to attend the institution in this study. The participants also had varying levels of difficulty visualizing and acting on their own goals of coming to the United States to make it a reality. In some instances, some had relatively little difficulty whereas others had multiple hurdles presented that inhibited the individual's ability to attend the institution in this study.

A common area of discussion for the participants was earning a qualifying score on standardized tests to receive admittance to the institution in this study. In one instance (Stacey), the participant earned a high enough score for the institution in this study but not for a different university in the United States. Ultimately, the deciding factor in attending the institution in this study for Stacey was her standardized test score being high enough to gain admittance. Both the SAT and TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) examinations created stressful moments for many of the participants and several had to re-take one or both tests. In Jimmy's case, the need to score higher on tests resulted in having to delay admittance and, for Stacey, one institution lost interest in recruiting her.

A second cause of difficulty in coming to the United States for some of the participants was receiving proper documentation (i.e., a visa) from their native governments. To receive a visa, the international student-athlete needed to travel to his or her embassy and, in many cases, answer questions. Martha specifically noted that she was initially denied a

visa from her native country after being interviewed by a government official. Martha's coach at the institution in this study said he has had other international student-athletes fail to receive a visa from his or her native government which resulted in the student being unable to enter the United States. Some participants expressed great concern about receiving a visa after hearing stories from other people whereas others had no trouble obtaining theirs.

The NCAA requires all student-athletes (domestic or international) to send their high school transcripts to its clearinghouse to determine if the individual is eligible to compete. The NCAA is primarily interested in whether the prospective student-athlete has earned money competing in athletics (considered professional) and whether the individual meets the minimum academic requirements. International student-athletes have multiple issues with the logistics of the NCAA's eligibility process, and it begins with the fact that they are not aware of these requirements during their high school careers. Second, the NCAA has difficulty accurately assessing the academic backgrounds of international student-athletes because each country's education system is structured differently. Participants in this study indicated difficulty when translating their transcripts to English and fully understanding what the NCAA wanted. The participants often did just what the coach who was recruiting them told them to do regarding how to gain eligibility. Difficulty in the processes relating to eligibility from the NCAA for international student-athletes has also been addressed in previous research (Weston, 2006).

The participants in this study indicated how finite the opportunities were for them, and that few universities in the United States were accessible to them. Essentially, the international student-athletes are only able to select universities that recruit them and offer them a scholarship. This issue was especially problematic for Abby. Abby first attended an

institution that did not offer her academic area of interest, but she attended because it was one of the few institutions that recruited her. As a result, she was not able to pursue the major she desired and, ultimately, transferred to the institution in this study. Abby risked having no institution to attend by leaving her initial school. She mentioned she was lucky to be recruited by a second school. The lack of interested schools for international student-athletes has been discussed in previous research (Popp et al., 2011).

Research Question 3: How were the participants recruited to their institutions?

The purpose of this question was to illustrate the complexity of the world related to recruiting international student-athletes. Because coaches and institutions do not have the resources and interest to fly internationally on a consistent basis to evaluate individuals and then build a relationship, the process is vastly different from recruiting domestic athletics. As a result, word-of-mouth and informal forms of communication are common topics discussed by the participants.

Each participant's recruitment process was unique. However, a recurring theme was the importance of informal channels or word-of-mouth during his or her recruitment. Many participants discussed having a friend or teammate who had come to the United States. Other times, it was the relationship they had with a coach in his or her native country or in the United States who had insight into the process. Often, it was these relationships (teammates or coaches) that initially aroused his or her interest in coming to the United States by simply informing the individual that this opportunity existed. The relationships the participants had with individuals were the most important component of their recruitment processes. As their recruitments progressed, the coach became extremely valuable in the process because he or she guided the international student-athlete regarding what needed to be accomplished in

order to be declared eligible by the NCAA and receive admittance to the institution. Skype and e-mail were the forms of communication most frequently discussed, but the coaches and participants also made phone calls and utilized traditional mail as well. Furthermore, it was the coach who ultimately extended the scholarship offer to the individual. As indicated in this study, the scholarship was likely the most important factor in the decision-making process.

The participant's recruitment was impacted by the sport in which he or she competed. Jimmy plays a sport in which evaluating talent is less subjective than other sports. He receives a score that enables him to be easily compared to others because his country publishes national rankings. The national rankings are what drew the interest of his current coach (Brett) at the institution in this study. Furthermore, Jimmy had a former teammate already at the school, so he had a connection that increased his interest as well as Brett's. Some sports make it relatively easy for coaches to recruit talented athletes because published times and scores enable a comparison of prospects. Other sports are highly subjective, making the evaluation of talent difficult for prospective coaches. As a result, some international student-athletes need to be prepared to market themselves. Sylvia marketed herself by creating a recruiting video that she sent to coaches in the United States to garner their interests in her as a talented prospective athlete. Sylvia's video included footage of her playing her sport, and also listed her achievements in an effort to market her abilities to coaches in the United States who could not fly to see her compete. Sylvia said she could have hired a company to help market herself, but she decided to complete the entire process on her own.

The NCAA played a role in all of the participants' recruitment because it set parameters about how the coaches could communicate with potential student-athletes. Many of the participants in this study indicated the rules set in place by the NCAA inhibited his or her ability to properly communicate with the coaches during a time when they needed information from them. Coaches are prohibited from communicating with recruits during certain times of the year by the NCAA. Furthermore, the participants in this study had little knowledge about the NCAA rules, so it was difficult for them to understand and properly navigate these rules during their recruitment process.

An important component of the recruitment of the participants emerging in this study was the vast difference of the process for international versus domestic student-athletes. The participants in this study knew very little about the institution they would attend. Coco was the only participant who was able to visit campus before starting classes. Furthermore, the participants said the information about the institution was gained by access on the internet, what the coaches told them and, in some cases, from friends or mentors they knew who had attended the school. Ultimately, the participants chose the university because they were offered a scholarship, there were talented athletes competing in their sports on the team, the school was in the United States, and they had built a relationship with the coach. All other aspects (i.e., academic prestige, athletics tradition of success, location, etc.) of their decision-making processes seemed less important. The premise that international student-athletes consider different components in their decision-making processes than domestic individuals has been referenced in previous research (Popp et al., 2011).

Research Question 4: When non-native-English-speaking international student-athletes arrived at their institutions, what were their experiences like as they adjusted to a new environment and school?

This question was included because international student-athletes face unique experiences when they arrive at their institutions, which impact them socially, academically, and athletically. Their periods of adjustment are often dramatically different from those of domestic student-athletes; however, it is a topic that has received little attention. The ability to speak and listen to the English language as well as write and read fluently, the weather, different testing systems, and distance from their family members were common points of discussion by the participants.

Throughout this study's data collection, the participants indicated English as one of the main adjustments they experienced after arriving at the institution. All of the participants had experience with English prior to attending the institution in this study because they needed to pass the TOEFL in order to gain admittance. Furthermore, English was taught at their high schools and often the second language of their native countries. However, the participants indicated communicating with native English speakers and comprehending the material in their classes was difficult. For example, Coco said her lack of confidence in her English skills and perceived accent caused her to be what she referred to as "anti-social" as a freshman despite being an outgoing person by nature. Thomas said he had difficulty in his classes, so he sought advice from his coach about how to improve. His coach advised Thomas to sit in the front row, meet with professors before and after class, and read ahead to address his deficiencies.

Participants also mentioned how the different mathematical measurement systems impacted their athletic careers. For example, Thomas explained how he did not understand the workouts his coaches prepared during practice, and he was confused if he was performing well because of the different measuring system in the United States versus the metric system

used in his native country. The role that language barriers played in the experiences of international student-athletes aligns with previous research about the topic (Popp, 2005; Ridinger & Pastore, 2000).

A second common theme for the participants when they arrived on campus was the differences in the weather as compared to their native countries. Martha indicated she had never seen snow and was confused as to why the land was white when she arrived in the winter. She did not bring clothing suitable to protect her during the winter months, so she immediately had a negative response to her new surroundings. Thomas had a similar experience to Martha. The different climate impacted some participants socially, athletically, and academically, which is an important caveat to consider with individuals who travel to new climate zones.

Participants discussed the academic philosophies in the United States which differed from what they were accustomed to in their native countries and required adjustment. Specifically, the participants mentioned constant homework throughout the semester and multiple-choice exams. The participants who indicated they had to adjust to the system in the United States said they were used to essay exams with little homework during the period of a course.

Being a long distance from their family members and friends was a difficult adjustment for some of the participants in this study. Martha specifically discussed how she wept when she left her family and relied heavily on phone calls to feel closer to the family members she missed. The use of Skype and Facebook were common mechanisms many of the participants indicated helped them cope with being long distances from their family members.

Research Question 5: What factors have helped the participants to persist in their education in the United States?

This question was included to gain insight regarding individuals who work or will work with international student-athletes in a similar environment as the institution in this study. The participants indicated their teams and coaches played a vital role in helping them adjust as well as the institution's office to aid international students.

Participants commonly expressed great appreciation for being a member of a team. They said their teammates often acted like a family or a built-in network who assisted them with their adjustments to foreign surroundings at the university and community. Another important mechanism that the participants believed helped them succeed was the institution's office to aid international students because it provided them with paperwork and reminders that were necessary throughout their time at the university. Lastly, the participants indicated when the coaches had a checklist of activities and a list of what to set up, such as a bank account, cell phone contract, and meetings with advisors, it helped considerably with their adjustments to their new environments. An interesting tactic Stacey's coach utilized that helped her international student-athletes adjust was creating a rule that at practice English was the only spoken language. Stacey said, initially, she did not like the rule but came to realize that it forced her to utilize English more often despite her preference to speak in her native language, especially with her teammates from the same country. The rule also promoted togetherness on the team as opposed to the non-native-English-speaking individuals feeling separated. The role and value of the coach and team cannot be overstated regarding the participants' ability to adjust to the institution and, ultimately, enabling them to

enjoy their experiences academically, athletically, and socially. The value of being a member of a team has also been addressed in previous research (Popp, 2005).

Another component of the participants' experiences that enabled them to adjust to their new environments was the institution's office to aid international students. Multiple participants mentioned that the office provided them with necessary paperwork when they arrived as well as throughout their time at the institution. Furthermore, because the staff members in the office were familiar with non-domestic students and those whose first language was not English, they were able to provide beneficial feedback. Lastly, trips to the office exposed the participants to other international students whom they may not have otherwise gotten to know. Having the opportunity to meet other individuals who had or were experiencing similar adjustment needs was also perceived as valuable.

Research Question 6: What are the participants planning to do after they finish college in the United States?

The purpose of this question was to enable investigation of the participants' plans following graduation from the institution, and ascertain whether those plans may or may not have changed since their enrollment. Few similarities existed in the plans the participants had after graduating from the institution, and how those plans had or had not changed since they first enrolled. Multiple aspects contributed to the diversity in plans, one being that the participants varied in year in school during the data collection process; therefore, post-graduation plans were not as pertinent to some. Despite the lack of similarities, the topics of pursuing a career in professional athletics and whether to stay in the United States were common points of discussion among the participants.

Several participants indicated an interest in continuing to compete in their sports professionally after graduation. They wanted to “*give it a shot*” and see if they could earn money either in the United States or in another country as a professional athlete. Martha, Thomas, and Jimmy were the most adamant proponents of competing professionally, while Stacey said her interest was not as high as it was when she first enrolled at the institution. Interest in playing professionally for international student-athletes has been addressed in previous research (Popp et al., 2011). A lack of interest in playing professionally was also expressed by participants in this study, and this finding has also been revealed in previous studies (Duda, 1989; Kontaxakis, 2011; Popp, 2005; White, 1995).

Staying in the United States in some capacity was also a common point of discussion among the participants. On one hand, Sylvia expressed an interest in working in the United States for a period of years to gain experience, with the ultimate goal of returning to her native country. Coco wanted to live in the United States for a short period of time before attending graduate school in the United States or her native country. On the other hand, some of the participants said they had no interest of staying in the United States after graduation when they first arrived. However, their stances became more flexible after living in the United States and the option of staying was more appealing for a variety of reasons. The ultimate goal of returning to their native counties was a recurring interest of some of the participants.

The findings presented in this study affirm those from previous research about the topic while also bringing to light new components of the experiences of international student-athletes whose native language is not English. Previous studies relied heavily on quantitative research methods and rarely collected data from the international student-athletes,

themselves. This study revealed the uniqueness of each individual's experience, and that international student-athletes have a multitude of reasons for being interested in attending the institution, different challenges in their recruitments, ease or difficulty in adjustment to their new surroundings, and differences in how their post-graduation plans evolved.

Implications

This study has implications for multiple groups of people including coaches, athletics administrators, university staff members, and potential international student-athletes, themselves. While this study investigated the experiences of international student-athletes at one NCAA Division I university, the findings of this study might aid individuals who are associated with a variety of institutional types. It is important to understand that each individual's experience will be unique while certain similarities may exist among different individuals from other institutions. This section is divided into subsections related to the group of individuals to whom the findings may be of interest.

Coaches

Coaches can utilize the information from this study in a variety of ways. First, they can have a strong sense as to why prospective international student-athletes may have an interest in attending an institution in the United States and how they learned of the opportunity.

Second, coaches may gain a better understanding of the recruitment process. As this study revealed, the recruitment process of international student-athletes varies from that of domestic student-athletes. As a result, coaches may better understand how to navigate the landscape when assisting international student-athletes. During the recruitment process,

international student-athletes have a variety of potential hurdles to overcome – from the NCAA, the enrollment process at the university, and their national governments – that could impact whether they are able to attend the institution that is recruiting them. The hurdles that an international student-athlete may need to overcome are important for coaches to consider and understand if they hope to successfully recruit these individuals.

Finally, the adjustment period the international student-athletes will ultimately experience is vital for coaches to understand in order to keep these individuals at their institutions as well as for them to succeed academically and athletically. The findings of this study illustrated that coaches and teammates of international student-athletes can have an immense impact on how they adjust to their new surroundings. Coaches who embraced that international student-athletes have considerable adjustment and, thus, tried to help those individuals had significant success in retaining and recruiting new international student-athletes. Furthermore, a team that fostered togetherness, despite having multiple international student-athletes, proved to be powerful, as it evolved from the atmosphere the head coach initially created. Conversely, this study indicated that the process is far from a perfect science regarding how to find, recruit, enroll, and guarantee an international student-athlete excels at the institution. Because of the heightened possibility the individual may not ever make it to campus and the resource investment required to successfully recruit international student athletes, this study may help coaches have a better understanding of the process as they consider whether this is a group they want to actively recruit.

Athletics department administrators and support staff

Individuals who wish to work administratively in collegiate athletics departments can also benefit from the findings in this study. By having a better understanding of the

experiences of coaches who recruit and coach international student-athletes, athletics administrators may gain more confidence about their positions based on the successes and challenges others faced. Whether it is a compliance officer helping a coach with the eligibility process, a support staff individual who works with international student-athletes, or the supervisor of a coach, much can be gained by having a more in-depth understanding of the experiences of this ever-expanding group in Division I athletics. The participants in this study shared how little they knew about the NCAA processes. Knowing how departmental officials can assist coaches in guiding the international student-athlete to be eligible will benefit the athletics department as well as the institution itself. Similarly, assisting coaches with the admittance process to the institution would be a significant help to the department because participants in this study showed they lacked understanding in that component of the process as well. While it may not be financially responsible to add more staff, a department with coaches and administrators who are educated about how each can impact the experiences of international student-athletes as well as what the international student-athlete may experience would be beneficial.

Future international student-athletes

Potential international student-athletes also stand to benefit by reading this study. It may be advantageous for international student-athletes to gain a better understanding of what may occur during the recruitment and once they arrive on campus. Learning about the experiences that helped and hindered other international student-athletes would put someone interested in the opportunity at an advantage over those who are novices. Furthermore, this study presented reasons other international student-athletes were initially interested in the opportunity to attend a United States institution and how their dreams were or were not

fulfilled. On one hand, by learning about others who pursued the opportunity, prospective international student-athletes may gain more information to determine if they should continue their interest. On the other hand, a potential drawback for a prospective international student-athlete is if he or she believes that what the participants in this study experienced would mirror his or her own. It is impossible to say what one needs to do to earn a scholarship, gain admittance, be eligible, be granted access to leave their native countries by the government, and to have a fulfilled experience at the institution the individual attends. The purpose of this study was to provide information about some components that one may experience and might consider related to international student-athletes.

Non-athletics university personnel

Another group of individuals this study might aid are university staff members. Regardless of whether they are professors or support staff individuals, participants in this study made it clear that non-athletics-department staff members can play a major role in their experiences. Multiple participants cited the office to aid international students as a key entity that helped them in a variety of ways. Not every institution has the resources to have such an office, but this study indicated that it was important at the institution in this analysis. Additionally, faculty members and academic advisors were mentioned as important components in the experiences of the participants in this study. Whether it was helping the participants find the right major and classes or taking the time to meet before or after a class to review materials, the participants gave multiple examples of how non-athletics-department staff members can play an important role. Any university staff member who may interact with international student-athletes would benefit from reading this study to gain a better

understanding of this group. Furthermore, with the continued growth of international student-athletes coming to United States institutions, it can be argued that any university staff member would benefit from reading this study.

Recommendations for Future Research

While this study provided new, rich information about the topic of international student-athletes because it utilized qualitative research methods, many opportunities for future research still exist. Because the purpose of this study was to ascertain the experiences of non-native-English-speaking individuals from one institution, future opportunities exist for studies at a different campus or contrasting differences on multiple campuses. Furthermore, NCAA Division I institutions offer different types of experiences to other schools that participate in intercollegiate athletics. While few international student-athletes attend institutions that do not offer athletics scholarships, a study about the international student-athletes from non-NCAA-Division-I institutions would offer new data than what was provided in this study.

Gender-based, sport-based, country-based, or different socioeconomic status studies regarding the experiences of international student-athletes would also be meaningful. This study attempted to provide general information about a number of different groups. However, research contrasting the experiences of international student-athletes who are of the same gender, play the same sport, or are from the same country may offer rich findings that were not a goal in this study. Studies about international student-athletes from revenue sports (men's basketball and football) may also provide new findings. Particularly in men's basketball, there continues to be an increase in international student-athletes; thus, studying

this group may provide important information on the topic, but it was not a part of this research.

Future studies that follow international student-athletes years after graduating from their institutions would also be advantageous. This study was limited to individuals while they were still enrolled. As a result, the participants were able only to provide a forecast of their post-graduation plans. It would be interesting to conduct a study of participants several years after they graduated to learn how their college experiences had impacted their lives. Furthermore, such a study would enable participants to indicate how their post-graduation lives aligned with their goals when they decided to pursue the opportunity to come to the United States while receiving an athletics scholarship. The study could provide a meaningful reflection about their experience and would offer introspection into their recollections of their lives as an active student-athlete.

A group that could provide additional information about this topic that was not addressed in this study is comprised of those who were not able to come to the United States after receiving a scholarship offer. Common among all the individuals in this study was that they were ultimately able to attend the institution. It would be interesting and, perhaps beneficial, to learn about the experiences of other potential international student-athletes who had been recruited but were not able to enroll or leave their countries. Brad (Martha's coach) specifically referenced many potential international student-athletes who could not receive proper documentation to leave their native countries despite gaining admittance to the institution in this study. This group could provide new data as to why they were unable to enroll that may not exist in this study.

Final Thoughts

This entire research process has been an experience that led me to understandings that I had not envisioned prior to starting. I became emotionally drained at times when hearing about the experiences the participants in this study endured simply to attend an institution in the United States. Gaining a higher education degree through athletics is often taken for granted by domestic students. I have a much greater appreciation for international student-athletes and the coaches who work with these individuals. I also find myself reading or watching stories on international student-athletes with much greater interest. There is so much more to their stories than what has been researched or reported in the past, and I am grateful that this study brought those components to light. Many of the participants had been interviewed by newspaper reporters who asked them questions, but it was rewarding as a researcher when they told me I had a deeper interest than what was asked about in their previous interviews.

I came into this study fearing I would unearth unethical or misleading behavior that is often reported in NCAA Division I athletics, generally in traditional media outlets. However, I came away with findings to the contrary. For some participants in this study, an athletics scholarship provided them with the only opportunity to pursue higher education. While they loved their sports and had some level of interest in pursuing it professionally, athletics often served as the only vehicle to higher education. The only troubling findings were learning about the practices of an academic advisor or coach to potentially steer an international student-athlete to pursue an “easier” major or classes so they have the best opportunity to succeed in athletics and remaining eligible to compete. Furthermore, one cannot dismiss the “business” of intercollegiate athletics in that these individuals are recruited by coaches who

believe these students can help them win. As a result, the institution is more interested in investing the resources to recruit these individuals from an athletics standpoint.

Nevertheless, I was pleasantly surprised at how genuinely thankful the participants in this study were to have the opportunity to attend the institution in this study.

I greatly enjoyed the time I spent with the participants, and they seemed to enjoy our interactions. I experienced mixed feelings from my interactions with coaches, but I believe those feelings may have been a result based on perceptions of how traditional media outlets like to sensationalize (good or bad) athletics. As a result, coaches are often more reserved in sharing detailed responses. All the coaches were pleasant but, in some instances, it was apparent they were not interested in providing great depth in their answers.

The entire research process challenged me. I am well aware this was not perfect study; nevertheless, I am very excited to have brought forth new findings to a topic that is becoming more prevalent in higher education.

APPENDIX A. INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Institutional Review Board
Office for Responsible Research
Vice President for Research
1138 Pearson Hall
Ames, Iowa 50011-2207
515 294-4566
FAX 515 294-4267

DATE: 6/12/2013

TO: Eric Bentzinger
115 Crystal St
Ames, IA 50010

CC: Dr. Barbara Licklider
N247C Lagomarcino Hall
Dr. Nancy J Evans
N247 Lagomarcino Hall

FROM: Office for Responsible Research

TITLE: Experiences of International Student-Athletes

IRB ID: 13-232

Study Review Date: 6/11/2013

The project referenced above has been declared exempt from the requirements of the human subject protections regulations as described in 45 CFR 46.101(b) because it meets the following federal requirements for exemption:

- (2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey or interview procedures with adults or observation of public behavior where
 - Information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects cannot be identified directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; or
 - Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could not reasonably place the subject at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to their financial standing, employability, or reputation.

The determination of exemption means that

- **You do not need to submit an application for annual continuing review.**
- **You must carry out the research as described in the IRB application.** Review by IRB staff is required prior to implementing modifications that may change the exempt status of the research. In general, review is required for any modifications to the research procedures (e.g., method of data collection, nature or scope of information to be collected, changes in confidentiality measures, etc.), modifications that result in the inclusion of participants from vulnerable populations, and/or any change that may increase the risk or discomfort to participants. Changes to key personnel must also be approved. The purpose of review is to determine if the project still meets the federal criteria for exemption.

Non-exempt research is subject to many regulatory requirements that must be addressed prior to implementation of the study. Conducting non-exempt research without IRB review and approval may constitute non-compliance with federal regulations and/or academic misconduct according to ISU policy

Detailed information about requirements for submission of modifications can be found on the Exempt Study Modification Form. A Personnel Change Form may be submitted when the only modification involves changes in study staff. If it is determined that exemption is no longer warranted, then an Application for Approval of Research Involving Humans Form will need to be submitted and approved before proceeding with data collection.

Please note that you must submit all research involving human participants for review. **Only the IRB or designees may make the determination of exemption**, even if you conduct a study in the future that is exactly like this study.

Please be aware **that approval from other entities may also be needed.** For example, access to data from private records (e.g. student, medical, or employment records, etc.) that are protected by FERPA, HIPAA, or other confidentiality policies requires permission from the holders of those records. Similarly, for research conducted in institutions other than ISU (e.g., schools, other colleges or universities, medical facilities, companies, etc.), investigators must obtain permission from the institution(s) as required by their policies. **An IRB determination of exemption in no way implies or guarantees that permission from these other entities will be granted.**

Please don't hesitate to contact us if you have questions or concerns at 515-294-4566 or IRB@iastate.edu.

APPENDIX B. INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. Describe your journey to (the institution in this study), starting as far back as you can recall thinking about receiving an education in America.
2. What were your reasons for attending school in America, specifically (the institution in this study)?
3. In what ways has being a student-athlete helped with your experience and transition to (the institution in this study)?
4. In what ways has being a student-athlete hindered with your experience and transition to (the institution in this study)?
5. Talk about some of the relationships you have with other students who are not from the United States.
6. Who have been some of the people that helped with your transition to (the institution in this study) and your experience throughout?
7. What, if anything, did coach do to help you transition to (the institution in this study) and USA in general?
8. Did you have any issues during the process in coming to the USA, enrolling or being eligible to play?
9. After being a student-athlete at (the institution in this study) for x years, what, if anything, would you change about your experience?
10. What would be your advice to someone from a similar background who may be attending (the institution in this study) to be a student-athlete?
11. Can you talk about how different the sporting culture and system is in (the participant's home country) to what you have experienced in America?
12. What are your plans after graduating, have those changed since when you first wanted to come to (the institution in this study)?

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